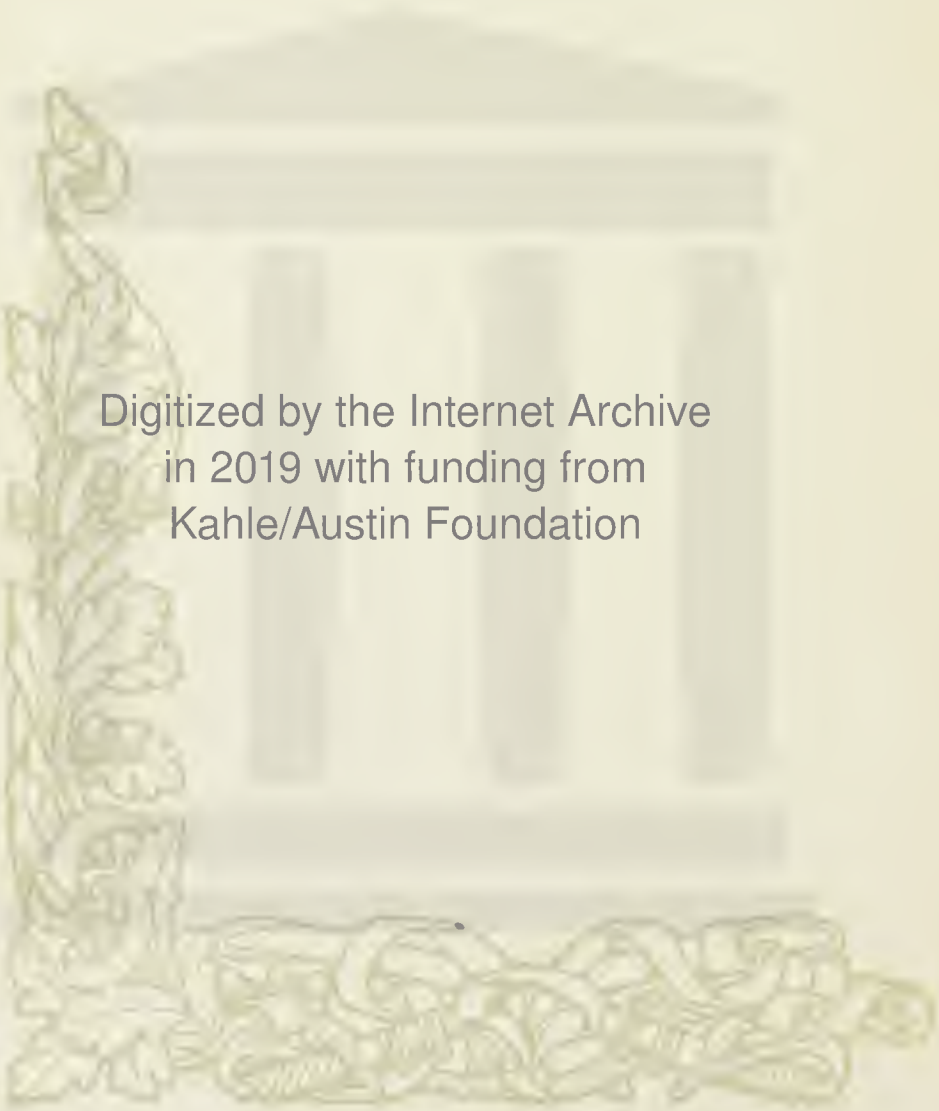
A GRAND ARMY MAN

HARVEY-J O'HIGGINS



A GRAND ARMY MAN

Wes' Bigelow

A GRAND ARMY MAN

BY

HARVEY J. O'HIGGINS

FOUNDED ON THE PLAY BY DAVID BELASCO,
PAULINE PHELPS, AND MARION SHORT

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY MARTIN JUSTICE

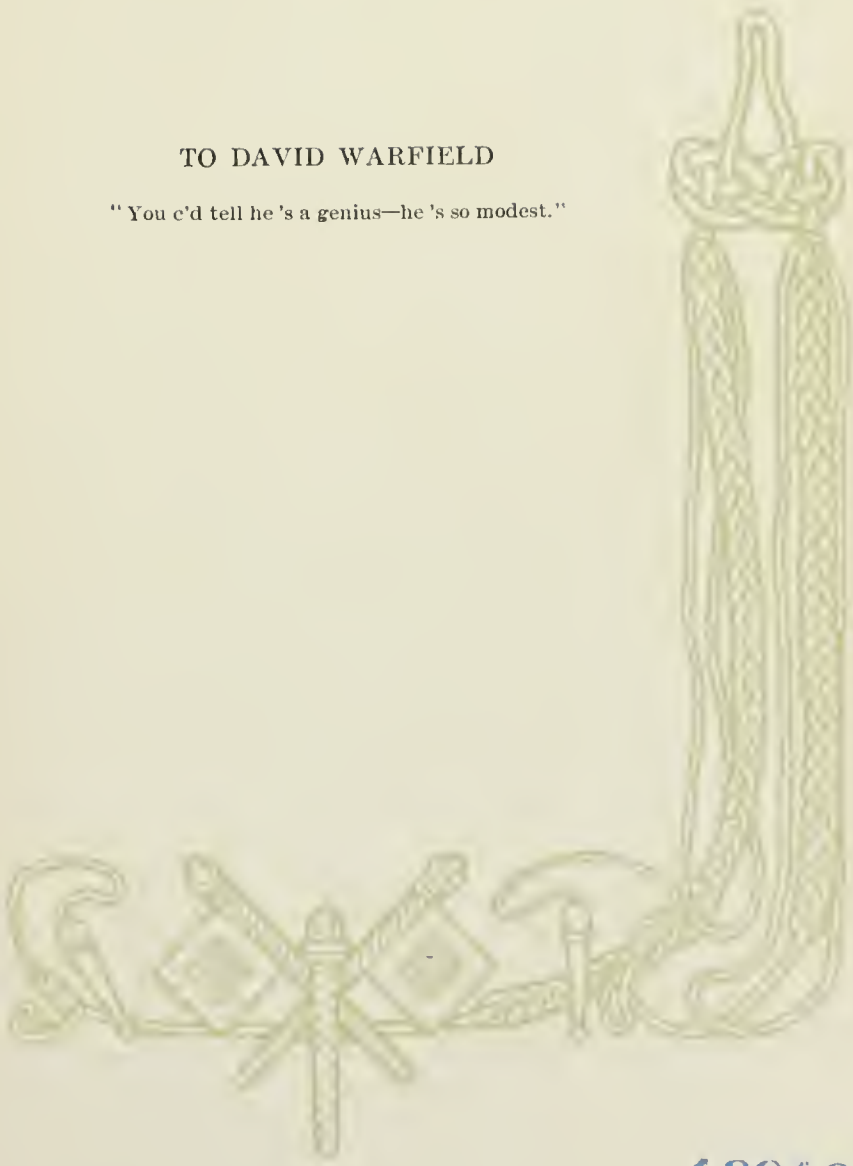
NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1908

Published September, 1908

THE DE VINNE PRESS

TO DAVID WARFIELD

"You c'd tell he 's a genius—he 's so modest."



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PREFACE

This volume is more than an attempt merely to "novelize" a popular play; it is the result of a desire to translate into the form of fiction the flavor of Warfield's acting and the charm of Belasco's stage. It has been, for both the artist and the writer, a labor of love—an effort to make some grateful record of the work of a wonderful actor and to catch in print and pictures the atmosphere of a beautiful play.

But it is the first condition of such a pious undertaking that the fiction shall stand on its own interest independent of the theater—that it shall not attempt to reproduce the acting and the stage, but to translate them—that it shall have its own inherent emotions and the appeal of its own

art. To that end are all the differences designed which exist between this story and the play on which it has been founded. They are not differences in degree but in kind. They were necessary if the reader was to have, instead of a pale reflection of the drama, a moving recountal of that little idyll of a girl's love and a father's devotion, of tears not too bitter, and of self-sacrifice relieved by the racy humor of life in a Western town in the early '80's.

It is hoped that for those who have seen the play the book will revivify the memory of an inspiring bit of stagecraft. To those others who have never had the good fortune to meet Wes' Bigelow in the flesh, may it at least be a faithful report and reminiscence of him and serve to tell his touching story where he cannot come to tell it for himself.

H. J. O'H.

A GRAND ARMY MAN

A GRAND ARMY MAN

I

"COME IN. Come in."

That was obviously the voice of a man who was used to driving a team; and it was followed by a heavy stamping of snow-clogged boots on the porch outside.

The empty room shook with it. You might have said it thrilled, for it was a room that was as human as an old face—not the set and formal room of social life, ready with a smile to receive company, but the sort of room that seems to wait like a mother in her home, worn and faded, to wel-

come, with all the charm and memory of love, those to whom she is still beautiful.

The light came cold and gray through the frozen panes of the little windows, where the snow showed high on the sills; but the cold gray mellowed on the faded colors of the rag carpet and took a warmer tone from the sere design of leaves and flowers on the yellowing papers of the walls. An old box stove radiated heat from the chimney-piece; the indescribable faint odors of home were in the air; and a wall-clock—a clock that was stained with age, and even hung with a broken horseshoe for a weight!—ticked comfortably to itself in the silence, as if it had been not so much measuring the vacancy of the moment as patiently expecting the hour of the home coming and the sound of this hearty voice on the porch.

It was a room of almost pious poverty—judging by the colored print of a flying angel near the window. And it was certainly

the home of an old soldier, for above the mantel shelf a flag was draped beside a bugle, and a portrait of General Grant held the place of honor between. Over an inner door a colored photograph of a small boy in red-topped boots explained the presence of a baby's high chair, that had been withdrawn into a corner as if it were no longer used. A rocking chair by the fire awaited an elderly occupant; the rush-bottoms ranged along the wall were emptily expecting a signal to draw up together and be companionable at their ease.

"Come in. Come in."

There entered, whip in hand, a man past middle age, in a shabby overcoat and a greasy gray felt hat, somewhat heavy-kneed and shuffling in his gait—as was natural in a stage driver who sat long hours on his box—and stoop-shouldered from nursing his reins. He had the weather-beaten complexion of health, the clear eye of the open

highway, and that mute kindliness of expression that comes of long companionship with horses.

This was Bigelow—Wesley Bigelow.

He went at once to a clothes closet—without further welcome to his guest—and stood his whip carefully in a corner, with the respect of a good workman for his tools. "Put yer bag down anywhere you like," he said. " 'Tish ain't finicky. Cold?"

The stranger stamped his feet and swung his arms. "Phew!" His city pallor had turned blue, and his eyes were running. "This 's something new for Indiana."

Bigelow had stripped to his waistcoat, finding the room hot. "Well," he said, "she 's beginnin' a new year. I s'pose she thought she 'd start things dif'rent. Take off yer coat an' set by the fire a bit. She 'll thaw y' out. . . . Letitia! *Oh*, Letitia!"

"Com-*ing!*" a voice answered from the kitchen—a voice thin but cheerful. And on

"That mute kindliness of expression"

the echo came a mild little woman, full of the bustling solicitude that is the motherliness of an old maid. There was still a sort of belated coquetry in her old-fashioned curls. She paused at the sight of the stranger and made an instinctive movement to take off her apron, with a fluttered smile.

"This 's Letitia," Bigelow said. He explained to her, with a sideways jerk of his head toward his guest: "Been a tie-up down the railroad some'ers. Could n't let him go to Tates's fer New Year's dinner, eh? He 's from Terry H'ute."

"Well, just *now*," the guest corrected, smiling formally on Miss Letitia Grigsby, "just *now* I 'm on my way from Jeffersonville. My name 's Smiffen."

"What? Eh? Jeffersonville! 'Tish? Wonder if he ever seen—"

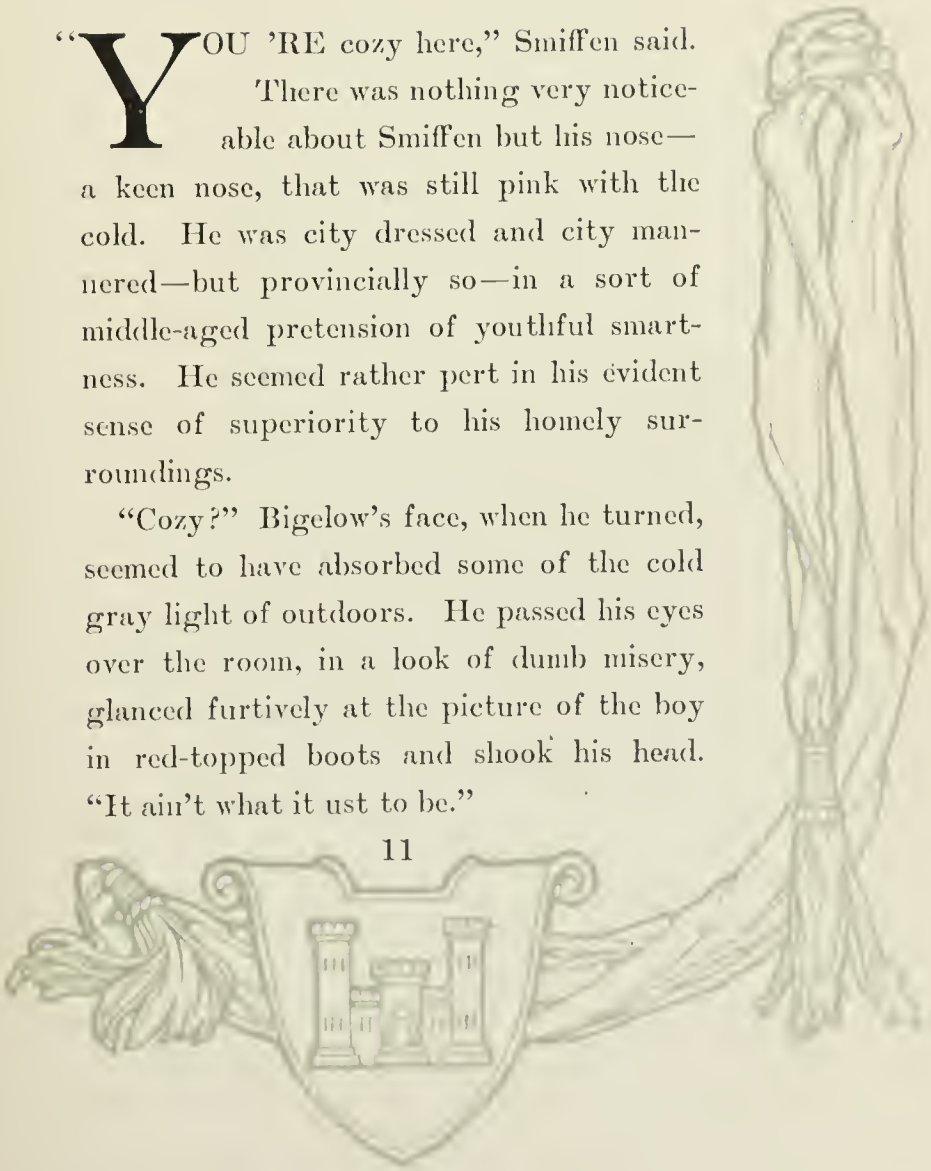
She offered her hand with a quick murmur of welcome, silencing Bigelow with a look. The stage driver turned away guilt-

ily and shuffled over to the window, his hands thrust deep into the pockets on the front of his trousers. He ignored the passage of compliments and excuses between the two others—Letitia apologizing for a dinner that had not been prepared for company, and the stranger assuring her that any dinner she might prepare would be fit for the best company in the world. And when Letitia had hurried away to her kitchen, anxious about a turkey that had already been kept waiting too long, Bigelow still stood with his back to the room, staring out at the desolate stalks and poles of his frozen garden.

II

"YOU 'RE cozy here," Smiffen said. There was nothing very noticeable about Smiffen but his nose—a keen nose, that was still pink with the cold. He was city dressed and city mannered—but provincially so—in a sort of middle-aged pretension of youthful smartness. He seemed rather pert in his evident sense of superiority to his homely surroundings.

"Cozy?" Bigelow's face, when he turned, seemed to have absorbed some of the cold gray light of outdoors. He passed his eyes over the room, in a look of dumb misery, glanced furtively at the picture of the boy in red-topped boots and shook his head. "It ain't what it ust to be."



Smiffen assumed an air of decent commiseration. "A death in the family?"

"Worse than that," Bigelow answered miserably. "Worse than that."

He went to an inner room to take off his boots and wash his hands for dinner; and Smiffen remained alone by the stove. He cocked one round eye at the boy's portrait, blew his nose reflectively in a huge handkerchief, and blinked.

It was the blink of curiosity—the shrewd and watchful blink of a parrot with its head on one side.

He was a commercial traveler—a "drummer;" and his necessary study of the weaknesses of his customers, and their soft sides, had made him a keen observer of human character. He rather prided himself on his ability to "pump" a secret. And yet he was sympathetic, too, like a gossipy woman, and as kindly as he was curious. His mouth was kind; and the blond baldness of his head

"It was a room that was as human as an old face"

and the clean-shaven plumpness of his face made him seem colorlessly inoffensive.

He understood that Wes' Bigelow was an old bachelor, and Letitia Grigsby, his housekeeper, an old maid; so the high chair in the corner must indicate an adopted child. It must be the boy of the portrait. He was not dead, but something had happened to him—something heart breaking, to judge by Bigelow's expression, something shameful, to judge by the look with which Letitia had silenced the old driver. What was it?

He stroked his nose reflectively, pinched it between thumb and forefinger, and expanded it—blew it up—until at the sudden withdrawal of his fingers, it fairly popped with the outrush of air. This was a mannerism acquired at the "checker" board, where it indicated that he was puzzled to understand his opponent's game; and since he was an almost invincible checker player, it

was a mannerism that had, to his mind, the distinction of any idiosyncrasy of the great. He was proud of it.

It might be accepted as characterizing the process of his thought. As the judicial stroke the chin, the sagacious pull the lobe of the ear, the dense scratch the scalp, and the studious play with a forelock, so Smiffen alternately pinched and fondled the nose—perhaps because it is the organ of scent, the tool of the prying.

He coughed behind his hand, as discreetly as if he were at a funeral. Then he sat back and looked sadly at the stove, prepared to listen and be sympathetic.

Presently Letitia returned, rather flustered, to propose that she should lay the dinner here, on the marble-topped center table, since the dining room was cold. (And Smiffen said to himself, "They 're hard up! They don't light the fire in there—to save wood.") Bigelow opened the bundle he had

thrown on the window seat, and showed to his housekeeper, apologetically, a pair of new blankets for his horses, "Countersign" and "Cartridge." (And Smiffen noted not only the simple humanity of the New Year's gift, but the fact that an apology accompanied such a necessary extravagance.) Letitia, as she spread the table cloth, complained that Bigelow was late for dinner; and when Bigelow explained that he had been delivering trunks, she remonstrated: "Wes', I hate to think of you haulin' trunks fer people that ain't passengers. Your father would n't 'a' done it."

"Well," he replied cheerfully, "the world 's full o' people doin' things their fathers would n't 'a' done." And Smiffen, smiling appreciatively under his nose at the retort, observed that there had evidently been a day when Bigelow himself would not have delivered trunks. (The secret that

"Your father would n't 'a' done it"

concerned the boy involved also, then, a change of fortune for the family.)

When they were all seated at the table, another incident occurred to pique curiosity. Bigelow, in his shirt sleeves, looked at the turkey and the cranberry sauce, and said, "D' you think they get them *there*, 'Tish—the turkey an' the usuals?" And Letitia answered guardedly, "Oh, I 've heard they do. Ain't you goin' to say grace, Wes'?"

He bowed his head in a pious mutter of thanksgiving, and then they began to eat in silence.

No one spoke until Smiffen, looking up at the portrait of the boy that faced him over the doorway, said winningly, "A fine-looking youngster. That 's a great forehead he 's got."

It was the bulging round forehead of precocity.

"It ought to be," Bigelow rose to the bait. "It ought to be—with a million

dollars' worth of inventions floatin' 'round in his brains!"

"You don't say so! Fine-looking boy. Is he yours?"

Bigelow lifted his eyes to the portrait and dwelt upon it as if it were a holy icon. "He was a dead comrade's son, an' 'Tish an' me raised him." He pushed back his plate, with his food almost untouched, and watched Smiffen's artful admiration of the picture.

"They 's no denyin' Robb has pers'nal magnetism," Bigelow said to Letitia.

"Just what do you mean by personal magnetism?" Smiffen drew him on.

He made vague gestures with his clumsy hands. "Pers'nal magnetism—it 's something that sort o'—sort o' comes out o' you. It 's a thing— Well, if you 've got it every one thinks as *you* do, right or wrong. That 's the way it is with Robb."

This was not eminently satisfactory. Smiffen busied himself with his food.

"The world 's full o' people doin' things
their fathers would n't 'a' done"

"Looks like a clever boy," he said thickly.

"Clever! *There* 's a boy that before he was eighteen was inventin' paint an' printin' presses an' spring bolts an'—Why he could make anything. He rigged up a scheme fer 'Tish there to do away with her washboards. Did n't he, 'Tish?"

"Did it work?" Smiffen asked her.

"Oh, yes, it worked," she said. "It took longer, but—"

"But it was *newer*," Bigelow put in.

"You 're not eatin' your turkey," she remonstrated.

"I ain't hungry," he said rather pathetically, his eyes full of tender thoughts of the boy. "Look here," he turned to Smiffen. "I want to tell you. I want you should know about our boy—so as if you ever hear anything ag'in' him—"

And Smiffen said to himself, "Here it comes!"

III

BIGELOW shoved back his chair and sank his hands in his pockets and drooped his head; and the pockets being high in front, the action raised his shoulders, so that his chin came on his chest, and he sat in an attitude of meditation, with profound eyes. He said at last, "I was tryin' to think what day it was. . . . It must 'a' been the day that we opened the new G. A. R. hall that night."

"Wes' was the post commander," Letitia explained under her voice, passing Smiffen the "boat" of cranberry sauce.

Smiffen nodded sagely.

"Yes, sir," Bigelow recollected, "that 's what it was . . . They was people settin'

along the road t' ask 'bout the openin' when the stage went by. . . . They tol' me, down to Tates', they was twenty-four strangers in town."

Smiffen concealed a somewhat superior smile.

Bigelow reflected, "That 's a funny thing, now. I thought it must 'a' been a sort o' dark day er something. An' it warn't. I mind, when I come in here, how the sunlight was blowin' in the window." There was in his tone a vague implication that he had not seen sunlight in that window since. "Jim was here with you, was n't he, 'Tish?" he asked—and then explained, with a crooked smile, to Smiffen, "Jim 's an ol' comrade that 's been proposin' to Letitia ev'ry now an' then fer the las' twenty years!"

"Why, Wes'," she cried in a confusion of withered blushes, "he was waitin' fer the meetin'!"

"What meetin'?"

"They tol' me, . . . they was twenty-four strangers in town"

"The Post meetin'."

"Sure enough! It was our last meetin' before movin' into the new hall. That 's right! That 's right! We sat at this very table here—me an' Cory Kilbert an' Jim Bishop with the minutes—an' Potter an' Tucker an' ol' Tate an'—an' Let' Pettingill. Yes, sir. Let' Pettingill was here. Well, well! Who 'd 'a' thought it!" He puckered his lips, looking back upon that gathering with a memoried eye, and seeing all its trivial incidents in a new light. "Let' Pettingill, eh? Let' Pettingill!" He seemed to find in the name a new meaning, a sinister sound. "He was squabblin' with ev'ry one, same as usual, too, an' snarlin' 'roun' showin' his teeth. We might 'a' knowed what he 'd do some day. . . . Well, a man 's what God makes him." He forgave Pettingill with a gesture. "We might 'a' done better by him, mebbe. We nagged him, I guess. P'raps

it was n't him that was to blame, but the drink. . . . He 'd been drunk the meetin' before, an' he was the treasurer, an' our safe was an ol' Rev'lution'ry relic, an' that 's how it come about that we sent Robb over to Wapahoe City bank with the money, on his bicycle—the first bicycle in the county seat. Yes, sir. Robb's was the first." He set his mouth in a proud compression of the lips. "That showed what they all thought o' Robb—an eighteen-year-ol' boy, trustin' him with over a thousan' dollars—ten hunderd dollars an' forty-seven cents!"

He caught Letitia's eye and dropped that incident of his story suddenly, in an evasive silence.

"It was the money we 'd been savin' up fer the new G. A. R. hall. We 'd been ten years freezin' the town up with ice-cream socials an' thawin' it out with oyster stews, so as to get it."

Smiffen laughed encouragingly.

Bigelow smiled a queer three-cornered sort of reluctant smile that lifted at one side to show a wisdom tooth. "We made Jim Bishop chairman o' the dancin' committee fer the night—wooden leg an' all—so as people with two sound legs 'd be ashamed to sit round an' see him."

"Ha-ha! Good enough," Smiffen applauded.

"An' we purty near raised a riot by appointin' Let' Pettingill chairman o' the drinkin' committee. He got up on his hind legs an' went after Jim an' Cory fer laughin' at it. . . . Them boys! Our meetin's ust to sound like a sessions in a kennels!—with Jim an' Cory scrappin' about politics ev'ry other minute, an' then goin' after Pettingill together when their hair was up. It ust to keep me poundin' the hammer on this ol' marble-top like a stone breaker." He lay back in his chair and chuckled genially, his rugged smile

"Our meetin's ust to sound like a sessions in a kennels!"

beaming with humanity, and all his miseries forgotten for the moment.

"They 're a great lot o' boys. They ought to be in here t'day—payin' New Year's calls. You 'll see 'em, mebbe. . . . Well, sir, I 've knowed 'em since I was 'bout so high. An' my! how they 've changed!" He added: "An' my! how they *hain't* changed!" He shook his head over it. "We ust to think a lot o' Let' Pettingill in them days—'cause he 'd never do what his ma tol' him—little red-headed rascal. She 'd call an' call to him, from the back door, to come an' bring her in some wood, er a pail o' water, an' he 'd go on playin' with us as if he never heerd her. Never turn his head. Cory 'd go an' get it fer her, like 's not. He was fat then, too—Cory was. He 's round 's a tub now. Great boy, Cory! . . . Jim Bishop was al-'ays kind o' pious. A good boy, though—an' a fighter when he got mad. He made a

record in the war . . . Pettingill enlisted at the first shot. It was a case o' run away from home fer him—anything fer devilment . . . Jim Bishop said his prayers over it an' volunteered with his mouth shut. He knowed his duty . . . I guess Cory went 'cause all the rest of us did. I did n't know much about Cap. Bestor them days. He lived in the big house up the hill. They all said it was the unyform got *him*. Han'some boy. Well—"

He came back to his subject with a sigh. "We had our last meetin' right here—before we moved into the new Hall. An' when we 'd distributed the badges fer the night, an' the boys 'd took out the locker—Hol' on, though! Hol' on! Judge Andrews come in before that."

"Judge Andrews?" Smiffen queried, as if he dimly remembered the name.

"Tall lean man, with a bunch o' gray horsehair on his chin. 'D be a good-lookin'

man if he did n't look as hard outside as he is inside. Sort o' man that 's got a face like a stone in a wall—with a crack o' mortar in it fer a mouth. Eh? Know him?"

Smiffen shook his head and returned his plate to Letitia for another helping. He was enjoying himself—cramming himself with food and gossip and chuckling appreciatively over both.

Bigelow blinked with a knowing grimness and drew down the corners of his mouth. "He was an ol' vet, too—an' our Senior Vice—but he did n't come roun' to Post meetin's any. He 'd levied on a cow an' some chickens that was all that was left to the widow of one of our Post members—an' the boys 'd soured on him fer it. We all got out ag'in him on election day an' made our evens—but he did n't like us none the better fer bein' licked." He jerked his head in the direction of the door. "When he

come in there, just as meetin' was breakin' up, we made him welcome best we could. He took it like you was offerin' a pippin to a horse that 'd bite yer hand if you did n't watch him.

"'I ast to be excused,' he says, 'from servin' on any committees t'-night,' he says. He 's got a voice like a hound bayin' in a rain bar'l. 'I 'll drop in durin' the evenin' with my daughter Hallie,' he says. 'It promises to be a mixed affair,' he says, 'but we 'll remain a short time.' An' so on. Talk like that—'bout 'G. A. R. affairs callin' out a rough attendance,' an' so forth.

"That cut into my hide. 'Well, Judge,' I says, 'ol' soldiers ain't al'ays social leaders,' I says. 'When our country needed men, she took 'em wherever she could get 'em. Sometimes they *were* rough,' I says, 'but a rough man died just 's hard 's a polished one an' fought 'bout 's well,' I says. 'I *like* to see 'mixed classes' smokin' 'roun'

the Post 's hearth,' says I. 'Don't know but what I prefer 'em. I belong to the mixed classes myself.' "

Bigelow had thrown back his head and squared his jaw, glowering reminiscently.

" 'My objection,' the Judge says—says he—'is 'at you invite only *soldiers*' frien's an' *soldiers*' widows an' *soldiers*' sympathizers. Why not appeal to another class?'

" 'You mean,' I says, 'the ones that stayed home an' got rich while we saved the Union?'

"That started him off fer the door with a crack o' the whip. I had to whoa him up an' coax him to back in ag'in. An' then I says, 'As senior Vice, don't you think y' ought to drill with us t'-night?' says I. An' he sticks out his long finger at me, an' he says, 'I been judge in this distric' fer seventeen years,' he says, 'an' honored in my state. I 've got a repatation fer severity, I believe, but no one never questioned

my integrity. You,' he says, 'you, a brother veteran, took off yer coat to defeat me durin' the last election, an' the members o' this Post followed yer example. After seventeen years I retire from the bench a target fer public abuse. You,' he says, 'you—'

"'Yes,' I says. 'When Jim Pope died, owin' you a small amount,' I says, 'I might 'a' kep' quiet when you took possession of his widow's cow. I might 'a' swallowed the cow,' I says, 'but when you sent back an' levied on the chickens' "—he pointed to his throat significantly—"'those chickens stuck right here!'

"'Legally,' he says, 'that widow's possessions belonged to me!'

"'Judge,' I says, 'if God A'mighty don't make a charitable man, they 's no use nobody else undertakin' the contrac',' I says. 'I give you the road.' An' he clapped on his hat, an' piled out the door there, with

"If God A'mighty don't make a charitable man, they 's no use nobody else undertakin' the contrac' "

as much noise as a team goin' over the Boggsville bridge."

Smiffen laughed applaudingly, and slapped the table. "Good! Good enough!" There was a new look in his pale eyes; it was one of amused admiration.

Bigelow waited—his mouth hard in wrath, his nostrils working. "Warn't I right?"

"You were. You were."

He made a gesture of despair. "Yes," he said hoarsely, "an' it warn't more 'n a day more before I 'd 've eat ev'ry word of it. Ev'ry word of it! Without butter. That 's what it is to be *right!*"

IV

HE rose from his chair and began to pace up and down the room. "I was right 'bout Robert, too, an' what come of it? Ev'ry one else wanted me to put him stage drivin'—"

Letitia suggested mildly, "Well, I can't help thinkin' we ain't done right to bring up Robb the way we did, Wes'. Sendin' him to college was bad fer him, maybe."

"Did you send him to college?" Smiffen asked, amazed.

"Yes; a year in a bus'ness college," Bigelow explained simply. "Don't you worry 'bout Robert, 'Tish. He 's greater 'n Robert Fulton."

"Oh, *Wes'!*" she remonstrated.

"Well," he cried, "what 'd Robert Fulton ever invent?. Nothin' but steam. While Robb—paint an' bolts an' printin' presses an'—"

"But he *ain't!*"

"He will. Give him time. I 've been as *sure* of him ever since he was a little scamp in red-topped boots."

She resigned herself to silence, looking at him with the fond anxiety of the woman who dares not interfere.

"Why, that same afternoon," he said, "after the meetin', when he come ridin' up on his bicycle— Why, his mind was that full o' things he scarcely saw a body. It was 'Hello, Aunt Letitia,' an' 'Hello, Dad,' an' then he grabs his saw off the mantel an' his plane off the desk, an' begins workin' away at them shelves he was makin' fer 'Tish's books. He did n't have time to eat—that boy. Bite a sandwich, gulp a glass o' milk, an' grab a saw ag'in. I tell you he

" He did n't have time to eat—that boy "

made the chips fly. It kep' us busy cleanin' up after him. Did n't it, 'Tish?"

"Most wore out my turkey feather," Letitia confessed.

Bigelow smiled and smiled with a mist in his eyes, recalling the vanished presence that had meant so much to them. "Wonderful boy! You could tell he was a genius —he was so modest. I could see he was sort o' worried about something. I thought it was his inventions, because he said he had n't been able to keep his mind on 'em. I cheered him up. 'Yer thoughts ain't just right yet,' I told him. 'A good soldier 's got to wait till it 's time to fire. P'raps these setbacks are needed fer the upbuildin' o' genius,' I says. 'All sunshine an' no rain don't bring out the fields.' 'Well,' he says, 'mebbe you 're right, Dad.' "

Letitia interrupted. "He was worried 'bout his mail. He was expectin' a letter."

"That 's so! That 's so!" Bigelow stopped

to eye her with a new comprehension. "That letter from town, eh? He must 'a' been worryin' about it *then*."

She nodded sadly. "Don't you remember you sent the boy over on the colt fer the las' mail. . . . An' I thought 't was all because he was in love."

"Why!" Bigelow said. "That 's what he must 'a' meant when he said he was goin' to make his fortune. D' you 'member? 'I won't explain jus' yet,' he says, 'but before I get through I 'll be ev'ry bit as big a man as Judge Andrews.' That 's what it was." He groaned and shook his head. "If we 'd only knowed, 'Tish. It might n't 'a' been too late—*then*."

They stared at each other, in a reminiscent tragicality.

"I could see he was discontented," he explained to Smiffen, who had been listening with a sympathy that was no longer merely assumed. "But I did n't know what it was.

I thought it was just 'at he was young an' seein' things in lumps. He was talkin' 'bout havin' failed in life—him that had n't both feet out o' the shell yet! Talkin' about ev'ry one in town bein' down on him because he 'd been born without a penny in his pocket—as if ev'rybody *warn't!* An' complainin' because he warn't ast to Judge Andrews'. That was another thing. An' sayin' that young Wellman was ast there right along." He shook his head, in deep thought, piecing it all together.

Smiffen asked, to keep him going, "Who was Wellman?"

"Well, you see," Bigelow began at the beginning, "Wellman an' Robb 'd been at school together, with young Hallie Andrews, the Judge's daughter. An' then Wellman went to Indianap'lis—he was a lot older 'n Robb—to study in a law office. An' he came back here that spring to represent the District Attorney before the Grand

Jury. An' Judge Andrews 'd kind o' picked him out fer Hallie—an' he lorded it over Robb. He come in here one day fer an express package. Sort o' doughfaced-lookin' feller, with spectacles an' a walkin' stick. The kind that 's al'ays blowin' 'bout how he 's got along. An' when Robb spoke up 'bout some people havin' luck, says he, 'My dear boy,' he says through his nose, 'there 's no such thing as luck. I had n't any bad habits,' he says, 't' encourage me to throw away my money. I neither drink ner smoke, an' I 've al'ays found time t' atten' church ev'ry Sunday'—an' he stalks out with his chin up, sayin' something 'bout jus' havin' time to get to supper at the Judge's An' that brung it all to a head with Robb.

" 'There you see, Dad,' he says, 'that feller comes back home an' gets the girl he wants. If a boy 's goin' to succeed he 's got to get away from where ev'rybody knows

"'I had n't any bad habits,' he says"

him.' An' then he up an' out with it that he was goin' to leave home.

"At first— Well, when yer boy says a thing like that, you don't know—you don't know how to think. At first I did n't believe him. An' then I tried to put him off by tellin' him to go over to Terry H'ute fer a day an' see life. An' then when he went on 'bout havin' big plans to get the money to go away—an' how he 'd never amount to a row o' pins if he stayed here—er he 'd go to the devil— He was shakin' like a colt, as white as paper. I thought he 'd overstudied, mebbe—a boy like him, talkin' foolishness!"

"So," Letitia put in, with spirit, " 'stead o' listenin' to him, you ordered him off to lie down in the hammock. An' then you quarreled with *me* fer tryin' to tell you he was in love!"

Bigelow had taken a horse collar out of the closet and sat down to mend it, like a cobbler, with needle and waxed thread.

"She burst into tears and fled from the room"

"You were pickin' at the boy," he defended himself. "Ev'rybody was pickin' at him, 'cause they could n't see the workin' of his brain. . . . They could n't see *far*."

Letitia rose to clear the dishes from the table. "A woman may not see 's far 's a man," she said, "but what she *does* see she sees quicker. I could see that boy was spoilt."

"Well, if he was spoilt," Bigelow cried, "it was you spoilt him."

"The whole town was criticizin' you fer—"

"An' you were sidin' with 'em. You—"

"Yes," she declared. "I *was* sidin' with—"

"Well, *that* fer this town," he cried in a passion, snapping his fingers. "An' *that!*" He threw the horse collar on the floor at her feet, and she retreated from the storm she had raised, taking refuge behind the table.

"Why, Wes'," she whimpered.

"I come home here t'-day perfectly amiable," he shouted, shaking his fist at her. "An' you keep at that boy! Dern it! You keep a-pickin' at him an' a-dingin' at him!"

She burst into tears and fled from the room.

"You keep a-pickin' at him an' a-dingin' at him!" he cried, stamping about. "An' a-pickin' at him an' a-dingin' at him!"

He flung out of the room himself, slamming the door after him; and Smiffen, looking around at the sudden emptiness of the place, lay back in his chair, convulsed with a silent laughter that was not at all unkind.

Before he could compose his features, Bigelow burst in again, and pointing a threatening forefinger at the closed door of the staircase up which Letitia had vanished, he shouted in a voice that shook the windows, "You let that boy alone! You let him alone! I brought up Robert to suit myself, an' I won't hear no more 'bout it!"

His angry glance fell on Smiffen, and he snorted, fuming.

"What 's that?" he cried wheeling on the closed door. There was no answer. He caught up the horse collar from the floor, turned on the door again, opened his mouth and shut it, and stood listening.

He could hear nothing. He stood back to look, through the fanlight, at the staircase landing above. He could see nothing. Then he called, in a relenting tone, "Letitia!" He got no answer. "Letitia!" No answer. He opened the door, and said, "'Tish! *'Tish!*"

It was all so delightfully simple and unconscious that Smiffen turned his back on it, touched, and went to the window to smile out at the snow.

"'Tish," he pleaded. "Oh, come on, 'Tish. Come on an' set down."

And when Letitia came down the stairs again, wiping her eyes, he apologized,

"Come an' set down. Mebbe I—I admit I was hasty. I—"

"If you 'd only take a calm view o' things," she sobbed. "But if I ever—"

"Now I 'm—I 'm 'calm,' 'Tish," he wheedled her, showing all his teeth in an ingratiating grin that was irresistible in its pitiable eagerness to make up. "I 'm just as pleasant."

"I know what Robb 's meant to you," she protested, allowing herself to be coaxed into a chair. "But just because his mother was the only woman you ever—"

"Oh, pshaw!" he said. "Pshaw! We ain't goin' to quarrel after all these years. Two parents like us—"

"That 's just the way Wes' went on," she accused him to Smiffen, "when I told him Robb wanted to run away because he was in love."

Bigelow sat down, subdued, and began to sew penitently on his horse collar.

"He flung out of the room himself"

"An' it was n't till I showed him the letters Robb had written to Hallie an' been afraid to send—right in this drawer here." She went to the desk to show him. "Robb did n't know I could get into *his* drawer by takin' out this upper one. An' it was n't till I showed Wes' the book 'To Hallie Andrews from Robb,' an' all those letters addressed—"

"Well, an eighteen-year-old boy!" Bigelow argued. "With his head full o' paints an' printin' presses! I did n't think he was that *kind* o' boy."

"You were that kind o' boy, were n't you? D' you think he was the only one off his pattern?"

"Why, it did n't seem more 'n the day before that I 'd seen him out in the garden ridin' on a stick horse!"

"Yes, an' when I proved it to you, what 'd you say? What 'd you say? That he 'd been led on! That he 'd never 'a' thought

of it himself! That she 'd led him on. You were just as *unreas'nable*, Wes'."

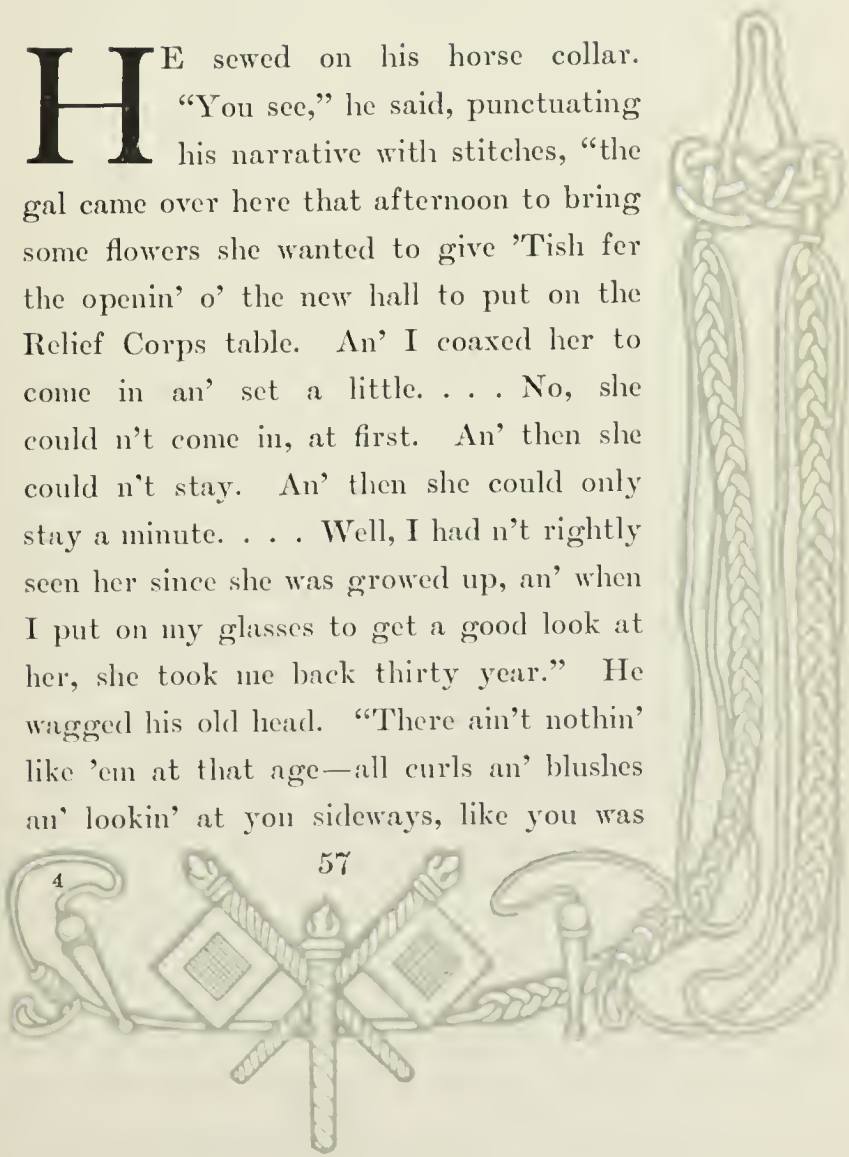
"Well, p'raps I was," he admitted humbly. "P'raps I was. But I could n't let my boy go without tryin' to keep him, 'Tish. . . . An' I did n't, neither," he boasted. "I got the girl fer him anyway, if he had n't 'a' gone an'—"

"What?" Smiffen blurted out. "Did n't he—" He sat down, blushing at this sudden betrayal of a curiosity which they might consider impertinent. "I mean I 'd like to—" He had supposed that the boy had run away because of an unfortunate love affair. "I feel sort of a personal interest in him. I—"

"Well," Bigelow challenged his housekeeper, "they 's no denyin' Robb has magnetism." She did not dispute it. "I 'll tell you," he said to Smiffen. "Robb don't know 'bout it, but— I'll tell you how it was."

V

HE sewed on his horse collar. "You see," he said, punctuating his narrative with stitches, "the gal came over here that afternoon to bring some flowers she wanted to give 'Tish fer the openin' o' the new hall to put on the Relief Corps table. An' I coaxed her to come in an' set a little. . . . No, she could n't come in, at first. An' then she could n't stay. An' then she could only stay a minute. . . . Well, I had n't rightly seen her since she was growed up, an' when I put on my glasses to get a good look at her, she took me back thirty year." He wagged his old head. "There ain't nothin' like 'em at that age—all curls an' blushes an' lookin' at you sideways, like you was



tryin' to ketch a yearlin' with a pan o' oats. . . . She was purty. I never seen nothin' purtier since Robb's mother." His eyes set in a vacant gaze that was bright with smiles. "Seventeen! She was seventeen."

Letitia whispered, "And when she told him she was seventeen, he said, 'Letitia! Get her a piece o' cake!' That 's all he knows about girls!"

She began to clear away the dishes from the table. The clatter roused Bigelow.

"I 'd no idee she 'd growed up so much. I remembered her 's a little gal—'bout so high. She was big fer seventeen—an' she said she was 'nearly seventeen' the way me an' you 'd say we was nearly seventy. It made me wish I was young ag'in myself. . . . She was purty.

"I begun to make up to her when I got her settin'." He winked knowingly. "An' I says, 'Miss Andrews,' I says, 'bein' a gal, o' course you 've thought 'bout beaus an'

"There ain't nothin' like 'em at that age"

—an' marriage?' An' she laughs, an' picks at the flounce on her muslin, an' says, 'No, o' course I have n't.' But I could see she *had*. Sure." He smiled that indescribable wide smile of his, tender-eyed to the point of pathos, but with an almost grinning show of teeth. "They mostly do—gals. A boy, now, he won't know what 's the matter with him when he 's in love like that; an' he ain't thinkin' 'bout marriage no more 'n a spring lamb. Eh? The gals 's got more sense. I could see *she* had—the way she laughed an' looked down at the flounce she was fingerin'. An' I says, 'Now I tell *you*, I don't know but they 's a steadyin' influence in early courtship, Miss Andrews—a steadyin' influence.' An' she says, 'Do you think young gals need steadyin'?' "

Sniffen chuckled. "You were thinking of the boy?"

He nodded, with an air of sober mis-

chief. "An' I says, 'No, no. I don't mean it that way. But it 's a great inducement fer young people,' I says. 'Gives 'em something to work fer,' I says. 'I don't know,' I says, 'considerin' all the temptations in life—I don't know but what early marriages *are* best,' I says, 'with the consent o' the parents, o' course. An' then,' says I, 'it keeps 'em home.' An' she says, 'D' you think many gals need keepin' home?' "

Smiffen, with his head on one side, sentimentally, had his mouth set in the fatuous broad grin of the heart-tickled.

"She did n't know what I was at, 't all. I could see. She was thinkin' 'bout her father wantin' her to marry young Wellman. She said her father 'd said a gal should n't think fer herself 'bout marriage —that *he* was the one to decide. An' o' course I told her I could n't encourage a gal to go ag'in' a parent—but—Well, you see, I wanted to find out how she felt 'bout

Robb, so I ast her a few leadin' questions. I ast her what she knowed 'bout housework, an' she 'dmitted she 'd been studyin' the cook book."

At this picture of the guileless old plotter and the unsuspecting girl Smiffen exploded in a sudden guffaw; but his hilarity was merely the nervous over-expression of his almost tearful delight in Bigelow's simplicity—in the charming simplicity of a lovable old man. He regained control of himself as suddenly, and coughed behind his hand.

Bigelow went on, smiling: "An' then after a little maneuverin'—'bout it bein' a good idee fer young people to start in early an' raise a fam'ly—I up an' tells her that Robb was talkin' 'bout leavin' home—'bout runnin' away. An' I seen by the way she looked up at me, scared an' took sudden—I suspicioned how it was with her. An' I says, 'Hallie,' I says, 'I don't want him to

"She 'dmitted she 'd been studyin' the cook book"

fall in love with the wrong kind o' gal. An' that 's why I sort o' begin to wish he 'd steady down to the right one—with *both* the parents' consent—an' stay at home,' I says. An' when I said 'the right one' I let her see I meant her."

Letitia had disappeared into the kitchen with her dishes. Bigelow laid aside his horse collar.

"Well," he said, "that brung it all out—'bout young Wellman. You see, she had n't any mother she could go to—an' o' course her father was ag'in' her—an' she had n't any gal friends, 'cause her father would n't let her have none. He put her above 'em. An' she had to tell some one. An' so she up an' tells me. 'My father,' she says, 'wants me to marry a man I can't love. It 's Mister Wellman,' she says. An' she wants to know what she was to do.

"I did n't know what to tell her. An' I wanted to make sure 'bout Robb. So I ast

her if she 'd ever picked out any young feller 'mongst those that were comin' to her home. An' she said she could n't—'cause her father never let hardly anybody come. An' then she says, 'I ain't very happy,' she says, an' purty near begins to cry.

"So then I seen I 'd have to take a holt o' the bus'ness by the bridle. An' I says, 'Look-a-here, now, Hallie,' I says, 'I want to show you something.' An' I went to Robb's drawer an' got out the letters, an' tells her they 're love letters he 'd been writin' to some gal an' never sendin' 'em. An' that made her look kind o' queer. They were in the envelopes an' all addressed an' all—but I did n't let her see who *to*. 'He must 'a' thought a good deal 'bout some gal,' I says. An' then when I leaned down —*so*—to find the book, 'To Hallie Andrews from Robb,' I kind o' held the letters behind me, so 's she could see the addresses on

"I kind o' held the letters behind me"

'em. An' when I straightened up, she 'd been peekin' at 'em, an'—an'— Eh?" he crowed. "Eh?"

Smiffen smacked his knee, flattering the old man with his pleased interest in this little idyll of country courtship. "Good enough! Did n't that—"

Bigelow wiped his smile on the back of his hand. "She begun to cry!"

"To cry?"

"She begun to cry. You see, Robb 'd never ast her, an' she— Well, you see, she said it warn't no use. Robb 'd never ast her, but she 'd sort o' knowed, she said, an' her father 'd knowed, too. 'He knows ev'rything,' she says. An' I guess that was 'bout right. Judge Andrews 's a mighty knowin' sort. That was why he wanted her to marry Wellman. An' she jus' put her head on the table an' cried, an' said she 'd sooner drown herself than marry Wellman —said she 'd sooner die.

—"said she 'd sooner die"

"That 's the way when you 're young, eh? As if there warn't goin' to be plenty o' time to die in when there warn't anything else to be done. An' she sobbed so she shook the table."

"You had your hands full," Smiffen said.

"Yes, sir. I 'd wanted to call in Letitia to help when she 'd first started to cry, but she said, 'Oh, no, *don't*, Mister Bigelow!' she said. 'If you knew how I was enjoyin' this visit!' "

"What!" Smiffen cried. "Well, I 'll be — Say!"

Bigelow nodded and smiled and shook his head. "Poor gal," he said pityingly, "I guess she had n't had much kindness. She thought I did n't understand. 'You don't know what it is,' she said. 'You think 'cause I 'm young I can't suffer,' she says. 'You don't know what it is to love some one with no hope an'—' "

He looked hard at the horse collar. "I

knowed that feelin'," he said. "I had it once fer Robb's mother. An' when she chose the other feller, I 'd wanted to die morn 'n once myself. . . . That 's why all my feelin's had gone out to the boy. An' why I could n't part with him. . . . He had his mother's eyes, an' his mother's smile." His face was working, tremulous with the approach of tears.

He rose abruptly, to put away the collar. When he came back, he said, "Well, I tol' her I could n't give neither o' them no encouragement. Could n't encourage a gal to go ag'in' her father. 'But if I was a gal,' I says, 'an' loved a boy, I 'd give him a chance to prove himself,' I says, 'an' then I 'd stick to him fer life.' An'—an' then I called in Robb."

"What!"

"Well, I could n't do no more fer him. I seen he 'd have to do the rest himself."

"Did she run?"

"Hallie? She ain't the kind that runs! She was just sayin' '*Please* don't tell him, Mister Bigelow!'—when he comes in, an' stops dead when he seen her. An' I says, 'Robb,' I says, 'I wanted you to know we 'd got comp'ny'—an' 'scused myself an' backed out."

The door bell rang.

He added, as he turned to the door, "I peeked in a while later, an' they was holdin' hands an' sweetheartin'. Eh?" He winked. "Eh?"

VI

THE door bell rang, or rather it tinkled—the timid, faint tinkle of a sleigh bell on an agitated spring. Smiffen looked up to see it quivering silently, as if in speechless excitement; and he smiled at it, not because its palsied tremors amused him, but because he was full of a kindliness that was ready to smile upon anything. He gave one friendly glance about the room (with an air of reconsidering surroundings upon which he had once rather looked down), and then turned again to the doorway through which Bigelow had gone into the little vestibule. He heard Bigelow's astonished "Why, I did n't know you 'd come back, Miss Andrews. I thought you 'd— Come in! Come in!"

Miss Andrews!

Smiffen half rose from his seat in the suddenness of his surprise, his pale eyes big with pleasure, his face even flushed.

He had imagined her a country girl in gingham, with an awkward manner, shy. The young woman who entered—in fur cape and muff, with a little seal cap on her fair hair—had all the self-possession of her youthful sadness, and accepted the unexpected presence of a stranger with the preoccupation, the indifference, the blank eye of grief. She was more than girlishly pretty; there was a woman's character in her face, and though her features had a waxen and dainty regularity, they had evidently been strengthened by suffering, and they showed no trace of tears. She was beautiful with that beauty of young tragedy that is as yet unembittered and still sweetly grave with hope.

"I thought you were in Indianap'lis," Bigelow said.

"She was more than girlishly pretty"

She explained that she had come back, on a visit to her cousins, for the holidays; and the "tie-up" on the railroad had delayed her. There had been no one at the station to meet her train when it came in, and she had left her trunk in the baggage room and driven as far as Bigelow's to ask him if he would get the trunk and take her "the rest of the way."

"Are they lookin' fer you t'-day?" Bigelow asked.

She admitted that they were not. She had written to them, she said, but she had not set any particular date for her arrival.

"Well, then," Bigelow proposed with ready hospitality, patting her on the shoulder, "you stay here t'-night, Hallie, an' I 'll drive y' over in the mornin'. Them two horses 've earned a holiday—an'—Well, this 's a kind o' lonely house these days, Hallie. Letitia 'll—'Tish," he called. "'Tish."

She put in, suddenly, "I 'll find her, Mr. Bigelow"; and drawing a crumpled paper from her muff, she said: "I brought a letter —from him. A few days ago— . . . I want to know if it sounds as cruel to you as it does to me." And before he could reply, she thrust it into his hands and hurried from the room.

"Well," Bigelow muttered, bewildered, "I—"

Smiffen watched her disappear through the dining room into the kitchen. "Say! She 's a fine-looking girl!" he told Bigelow with an air of drawing the old stage driver's attention to a fact which he had overlooked.

He was not speaking of her beauty only. He had been more impressed by the style and evident costliness of her dress—a girlish costume of the early eighties, when tight-fitting waists accentuated the bustles and flounces of elaborate skirts. He felt

that Bigelow did not appreciate the honor which she had done his boy by condescending to this courtship. And when he got no reply to his remark to Bigelow, he looked up at the boy's picture again, puzzled to understand what there could be in the youngster to attract such a girl.

Bigelow had put on his spectacles, unfolded the letter and addressed himself to the reading of it—leaning back against the table as he sat, and holding the paper high, to catch the strong light from a window behind him.

He had evidently become quite oblivious to Smiffen's presence in the room; and like all persons unaccustomed to reading, he found it necessary to pronounce his words aloud, in a reflective low voice, as he read them, one by one, with difficulty.

"'Dear Miss An-drews.'" He gave each syllable deliberately, with the tonelessness of a child spelling out a lesson. "'Your

The pathos of that sentence choked poor Bigelow to tears

let-ter re-ceived, and . . . al-though I re-ques-ted you to dis- . . . dis-con- . . . dis-con-tinue our cor-res-pon-dence, . . . I take this oc-casion to wish you a 'Happy New Year.' . . . Huh! . . . 'You say your fath-er wishes . . . you . . . to re-main in Indian-apolis. Well it . . . is a good plan. . . . Every-body says Indian-ap-olis is a fine place . . . and I . . . am sure you will en-joy vis-it-ing the Grand Op-era House and the Glass Works which . . . are lo-cat-ed there. . . . Please ob-lige me by for-get-ting me.' "

The boyish simplicity and pathos of that sentence choked poor Bigelow with tears. He blinked behind his glasses, his lips trembling; and Smiffen—who had been leaning forward, instinctively, to hear—drew back and looked down at his feet and did not look up again.

" 'Nothing you have said can . . . make me re-new our en-gage-ment . . . as you

sug-gest for . . . my life is en-ded. . . . I shall love you always . . . but I shall live a bach-el-or's life like my dear father . . . who is heart-broken by my conduct. . . . You will forget me . . . but my father nev-er will . . . and I shall help him out on my return . . . by driv-ing stage until he gets on his . . . feet ag-ain. . . . Then I am going to take off my coat . . . and go to work . . . and make him proud of me yet. I know . . . I have done wrong . . . and am willing to pay.' "

He held his glasses away from the tears that drenched his tanned cheeks. After a pause he continued, in a stifled voice, " 'I hope you will take the first chance . . . and mar-ry be-cause you are the sort . . . of a girl that needs some one to look . . . after her and though I nev-er thought much . . . of the fel-lows you liked before you met me . . . per-haps you will have bet-ter judg-ment now. . . . I have de-

cid-ed . . . this cor-res-pon-dence is very bad for us . . . both . . . bringing up mem-ories of by-gone days, . . . when I was young and happy . . . which I am not now . . . and never will be ag-ain.' " The letter rustled. Bigelow was wiping his cheeks with his bare knuckles. " 'With best re-gards for your con-tinued health . . . pros-perity . . . and matri-monial suc-cess . . . I remain . . . very re-spec-fully yours . . . Robert Bigelow.' "

He took off his glasses, dropped his hands in his lap, and sat staring at nothing until the tears dried in his eyes.

He had no smile for the boyish conceit, the boyish despair, the almost incredible mixture of the pathetic and the ludicrous in the letter. Smiffen *had*, but he did not show it. He was trying to remember where he had seen that name, "Robert Bigelow." It had been the name of a school fellow of his, and he had seen it somewhere, recently,

in print. He could not remember. He did not ask. He did not raise his head. And Bigelow and he were sitting so, in silence, when the girl returned, without her wraps, and asked Bigelow, accusingly, "Well?"

She ignored Smiffen—too absorbed in her own emotion to be aware of him—and he rose from his seat and went to a far window, where he turned his back and did not listen.

"Well," Bigelow said, giving her the letter, "it ain't newsy, but it 's def'nite. He writes a mighty good letter, that boy."

She put aside this parental impulse to defend the boy. She sat down at the table with a characteristic directness; and as if fortified by her interview with Letitia, she said in a low voice that shook with a tension of girlish resolve and abandon: "I 'll never give him up. I 'll never let him go. I 'd give up the whole world first. I 've taken my stand."

Bigelow shook his head sadly. "When

we 're in love, we 're blind. You 've got youth, but it don't al'ays stay by you. We get older—an' harder—an' wiser. . . . Hallie, my boy 's made a bad mistake. I would n't admit that to nobody but you. An' some day, when you 're older, you might regret it. The boy 's got to begin over ag'in, at the bottom o' the ladder. *We* know what was in his heart, but the world don't know—an' don't *want* to know—an' it 's many 's the hard hour an' the hard day he 's got to win back its confidence ag'in." He put away his spectacles. "Go back to yer father, Hallie. Live on the sunny side o' life. Go back."

"Mr. Bigelow," she pleaded, "*you* ought to know how any one *can* love Robb. I could never love any one else."

"Well, o' course," he admitted, "they 's no denyin' Robb has pers'nal magnetism, but it might be 's well fer you to try an' live fer a while *without* love."

She reached out to lay her hand on his arm. "My father tried that. . . . I 've quarreled with him. . . . I can never go back to him. . . . I—I want to be here, near you—waiting for Robb when he—"

"Think well! It 'll stand ag'in' him all his life!"

"Do you *advise* me to give him up? Do you? *Really?* In your heart?"

"No," he confessed, "I das n't do that. After all, he might be the one man—an' you might be missin' life. . . . No. . . . That 's something only *you* can decide." He went around the table to her, and bent down to kiss her. "Hallie," he said, "I al'ays liked you." She burst into tears—the tears of a rather tragic happiness—with her head on the table. "Tsh! Tsh!" he comforted her. "Don't cry." And seeing Smiffen trying politely to efface himself from notice beside the window, he added, "Here 's Mister—Mister Smiffen.

You have n't met Mister Smiffen. He 's on his way from Jeffersonville. He 's been held up, too. . . . That 's a good gal."

Any one hearing Smiffen tell "funny stories" in the smoking car or the "sample room" would have thought he had a merely gallic opinion of women, and never looked at any except with the predatory eye of a lady-killer, smiling like Mephistopheles and Don Juan. But when Hallie rose, on Bigelow's introduction, and offered her hand blindly, still wiping her eyes, Smiffen took and held her cold fingers with as decent a feeling of compassion as any one could wish. He even tried to comfort her with a fatherly squeeze as he said, "I don't know what 's the matter, Miss Andrews, but it 'll come out all right, I guess. It 'll come out all right." And she replied to the reassuring pressure of his handshake with an apologetic smile—a faint but trusting smile that accepted him, through her tears, as a kindly

stranger who had seen her emotion and sympathized.

He felt somewhat embarrassed. He need not have felt so. Her simple training had not taught her to wear one face to strangers and another to friends; and she had no false modesty about her love for the boy before either strangers or friends.

Bigelow had been explaining: "I 've been tellin' him 'bout Robb—'bout his inventions, an' all like that. I wanted he should know —in case he ever heerd anything ag'in' him."

"Yes," she said, withdrawing her hand reluctantly. And Smiffen assured her, "I have n't heard anything but good things about him *yet*."

The accent on the "yet" did not exactly hint that he *wished* to hear more, but it conveyed the impression that if *they* wished to tell him more, they would find him a friendly listener whose interest was already engaged on the boy's behalf.

" And he said he did n't know whether a girl *could* understand—about stocks "

She thanked him with a shy regard, and glanced at Bigelow. He was evidently considering whether it would not be better for Smiffen to hear the whole story from them rather than from the gossip of the village.

Bigelow sat down thoughtfully, his hands in his pockets. The girl took a seat at the table, her arms on the marble top, gazing out the window. Smiffen withdrew to his chair by the stove.

After an interval of thought, Bigelow said unexpectedly, "What I can't make out, Hallie, is how the Judge knowed 'bout Robb before any of us."

"Why, you see, Mr. Bigelow," she faltered, "Robb had told me and I—"

"When? When did he tell you?"

She confessed faintly, "That afternoon."

"*Hallie!* . . . Why did n't you come an' tell me?"

"But I did n't understand!" she cried. "I did n't understand what it meant. And

he did n't. . . . You see," she defended herself, "the first words he said when you left us alone here that afternoon—he said in case he left town suddenly, he wanted me to know he thought there 'd be more than *one* successful fellow come out of this town. And I knew he was referring to Mr. Wellman, and I thought he meant that one of his inventions had turned out well. And he said, 'No; it was n't that.' "

She hesitated, glancing up at the bell above the door. "He showed me the burglar alarm to ring the door bell—and about his idea for putting wooden casters on the table. But he said it was n't about those."

She turned to the old man. "And then," she said, in a sudden desperate rush of words, "he told me that when he rode over to the city to deposit the money for the G. A. R., he met a man that he used to know when he was at the business college, and this man showed him how he could make five

"He showed me the burglar alarm to ring the door bell"

thousand dollars by investing the one thousand for three days. And that was what he meant by saying there 'd be more than one successful— He was expecting a letter with the profits any minute."

"An' did n't you know—" Bigelow began.

"I did n't understand at all," she cut in, twisting and untwisting her handkerchief around her fingers. "Even after he figured it out on a page of his note book—so many stocks at so much a stock—to show me. And he said he did n't know whether a girl *could* understand—about stocks."

"But did n't you know it was wrong fer Robb—"

"Why, that 's what I asked him!—if it was n't wrong to use the G. A. R. money for something else when he 'd been given it to deposit in the bank. And he said the sureness of it made it all right, because he 'd have the money back, and the profits, too, that night. And when I asked him if

"I told him I wished he would n't go away, because this was my home"

you knew, he said, 'No; a man of eighteen ought to depend on his *own* judgment'—and he was so sure of it that I did n't really think. I just thought how lovely it would be when he had the money, because father—And I told him I wished he would n't go away, because this was my home. And—and—" She put her face in her hands. "He—he kissed me," she sobbed, "and I was so happy, I—"

"There!" Bigelow cried, rising in all the majesty of an old man's emotion. "It ain't guilt that 's punished in this world! It 's innocence! It ain't the boy that knows he 's done wrong. It 's the boy like—like my Robb!"

And Smiffen, staring gloomily at the rag carpet, was thinking to himself: The same old story! The boy steals, and runs away, and leaves his father to foot the bill. And his father never really understands; and his sweetheart refuses to lose faith in

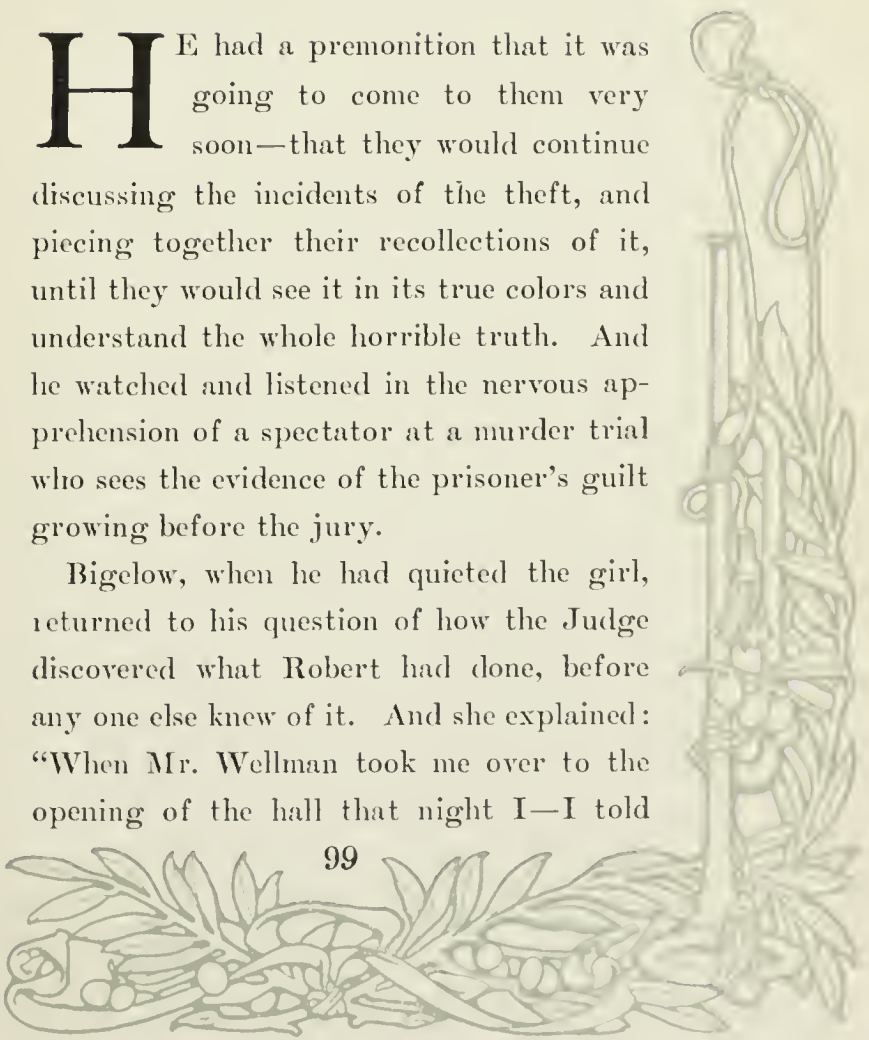
him even when he writes to her and throws her over; and then, when the awakening comes—

He looked up, compassionately, at Bigelow trying to comfort the girl. When the awakening should come!

VII

HE had a premonition that it was going to come to them very soon—that they would continue discussing the incidents of the theft, and piecing together their recollections of it, until they would see it in its true colors and understand the whole horrible truth. And he watched and listened in the nervous apprehension of a spectator at a murder trial who sees the evidence of the prisoner's guilt growing before the jury.

Bigelow, when he had quieted the girl, returned to his question of how the Judge discovered what Robert had done, before any one else knew of it. And she explained: "When Mr. Wellman took me over to the opening of the hall that night I—I told



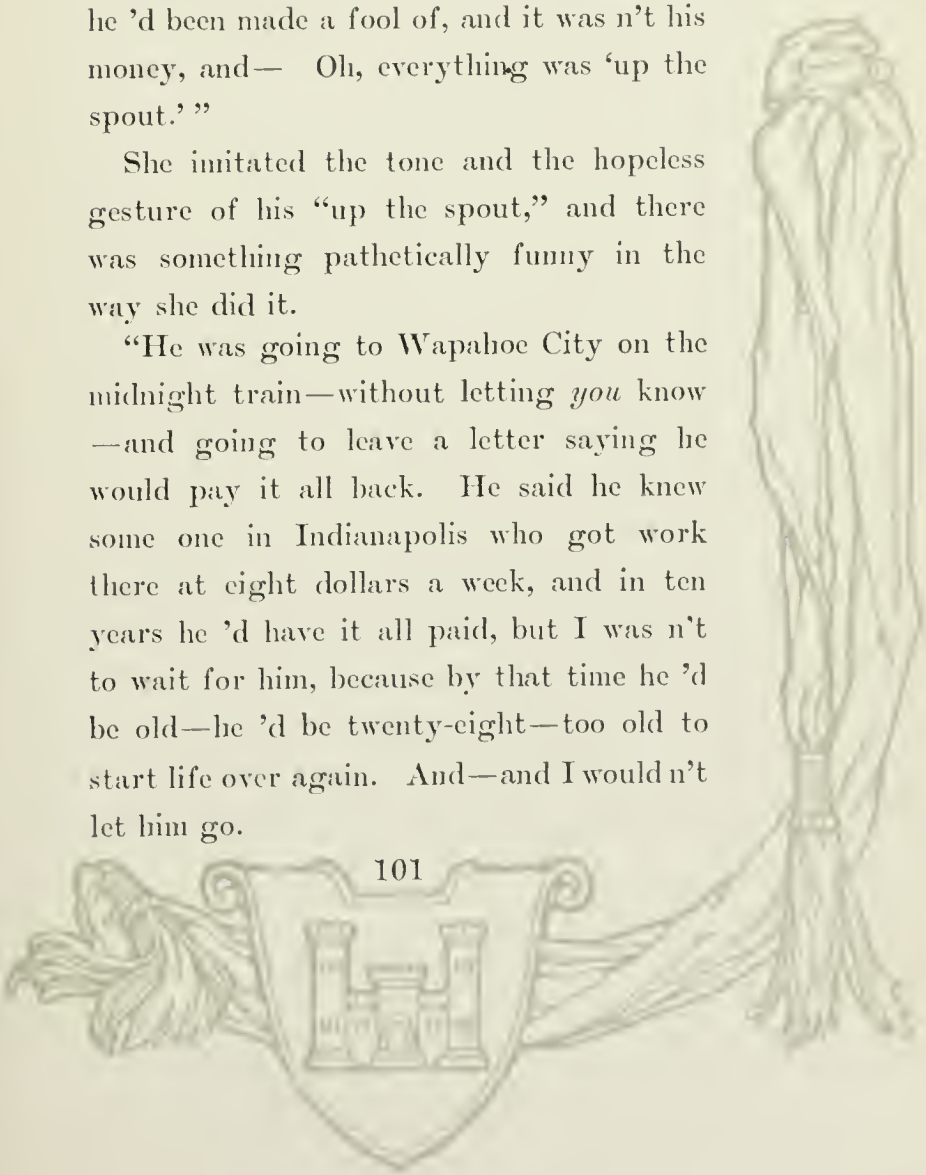
him I could never marry him. And I told him *why*. And of course he did n't expect me to dance with him after that, . . . and I tried to find Robb. He had n't come yet, 'Aunt Letitia' said. And he had n't told her any good news about his prospects. . . . And then I found him just outside, near the door, looking in; and I could see something had happened. He had n't his Sons of Veterans' uniform on. And when I asked him what was the matter, he said he 'd never wear it again, and he was leaving town that night, and he 'd only come to the hall to tell me good-by, and he 'd lost the money, and it was all gone, and he had n't any of it left. And then he showed me the letter from the man, and he kept putting his hand up to his forehead, as if he had a headache—and he said he felt sick.

"I—told him," she wept, "that I 'd asked him whether it was n't wrong to use that money—and he said he 'd been so *sure* he 'd

never really thought about it being wrong, maybe. And he said that even *now* he kept saying to himself, '*You* never took money that did n't belong to you,' but he *had*, and he 'd been made a fool of, and it was n't his money, and— Oh, everything was 'up the spout.' "

She imitated the tone and the hopeless gesture of his "up the spout," and there was something pathetically funny in the way she did it.

"He was going to Wapahoe City on the midnight train—without letting *you* know —and going to leave a letter saying he would pay it all back. He said he knew some one in Indianapolis who got work there at eight dollars a week, and in ten years he 'd have it all paid, but I was n't to wait for him, because by that time he 'd be old—he 'd be twenty-eight—too old to start life over again. And—and I would n't let him go.



"I could n't," she choked. "I could n't."

Bigelow had sunk down in his chair, in a hopeless misery.

She went on, in a strained and tortured struggle to have it all out, "I wanted him to let *you* help him. And when he said he could n't face you, I told him I had money of my own, and I 'd ask father for it. And he said he could n't do *that*. He could n't take money from a girl, or he 'd be worse than he *was*. And I told him he could pay me back—but he would n't do it. And I tried to persuade him to wait until morning, anyway. And then some people were coming, and I got him inside, to the coat room, and I made him promise to wait there until I came back, and then I ran to get father."

Bigelow groaned.

"I *did n't* tell him," she cried. "I *did n't*. I told him I wanted some money—some of my own that mother had left me—and he said he 'd give me part of my monthly

"I told him I wanted some money"

allowance the next day—and I told him I wanted quite a sum, and he asked what I wanted it for, and I said I could n't tell him, except that I wanted to do some good with it, and it was *my* money, and it need n't matter to *him* what I did with it. And he said I wanted it for some one else, and I told him no one had asked me for it—that I had been asked *not* to ask for it. And he said, 'Then some one *has* spoken to you about it.' And I told him I had n't said *that*, but any one might be unfortunate and lose everything—and I begged him, and told him that after all I had a lot more money—that I only needed a thousand dollars. And he said, 'Is *that* all!' And I said, 'No; a thousand dollars and forty-seven cents.' And he said, 'That 's an odd sum. One thousand dollars and forty-seven cents. Where have I heard that sum before!' And then all at once he said I wanted it for 'the Post Commander's son.' And—and—"

She broke down and sobbed, "I—I told him I loved Robb, and asked him to help us, b-but it was no use."

Bigelow shook his head. "It was no use. Ev'rything played against us—ev'rything!"

"I did n't think he 'd know," she cried, "just from the amount."

"An' he would n't," Bigelow exonerated her. "He would n't, Hallie—if it had n't been fer that check o' his. It might 'a' been days—an' I could 'a' got the money put back in the bank—if it had n't been fer his check. I should n't 'a' took it. I should n't 'a' took it."

He turned to Smiffen, as if to clear the girl by confessing his own mistake. "He 'd come in here that afternoon," he said, "before he 'd found out anything. You was here, was n't you, Hallie?"

"Yes," she replied faintly. "I hid in the dining room when I saw him coming."

"She 'd been here with Robb. An' when the Judge came in, I— Well, I shook hands with him, an' made Robb shake hands with him, 'cause I thought I had it fixed fer Robb to stay home an' marry her, an' I wanted to be frien's with the Judge. An' he said, 'Mr. Bigelow, you tell me the Post has deposited to its credit one thousan' dollars.' An' I says, 'One thousan' dollars an' forty-seven cents, in the Wapahoe City Bank,' I says. 'Robert deposited it. Rode over on his bicycle,' I says. An' the Judge says, 'A balance o' four hundred dollars is still needed to complete the final payment on the hall?' he says. An' Robert said that was right—that the bank book was in his room. An' the Judge said he 'd decided to give us this balance on condition that the Post paid ev'ry bill, so 's we could say the hall opened that night free o' debt.

"'Well, Judge,' I says, 'I salute you. I salute you, Judge. You 're a good soldier,

after all.' An' he set down at the table there to write the check. An' while he 's writin' it, he says, 'Wesley,' he says, 'I take this means of answerin' those who opposed me. I want you to announce this gift publicly t'-night. I want ev'ry one to know that you, who caused my defeat, an' the Post members, who are drivin' me from the bench—' An' I said, 'No, Judge. I balk at that. I ain't out eatin' crow,' I says. An' I let him take his check an' go."

He passed his hand across his forehead wearily. "Well, what was the use? There was the boy an' Hallie. I could n't let him go away mad. I called him back an' took it."

"I coaxed you to," Hallie accused herself. "You would n't have—"

"Yes, I would," he lied. "Yes, I would. I 'd 'a' done it anyway. . . . An' besides," he consoled her, "it would n't 'a' made no diff'rence either way. An' we were happy

"I ain't out eatin' crow"

fer the rest o' the day, anyway, were n't we?"

"Yes," she said. "I thought it was going to come out all right. I thought Robb was going to get his five thousand dollars."

Bigelow pondered sadly, as if overcome in his old age by a despairing sense of the vanity of human virtue. "It 's the innocent," he said. "It 's the innocent—an' the foolish. I ought to 've got more sense. An ol' man like me. I ought to 've learned more—more craft. I did n't know nothin'."

Smiffen, weighed down with his universal gloom, asked throatily, "What did he do? Expose the boy?"

"Expose him!" Bigelow cried. "Expose him! 'S soon 's Judge Andrews left her that night—after he 'd found out 'bout Robb—he got Let' Pettingill, the treasurer o' the Post—an' *him* drunk! He 'd come to the hall drunk that night, an' I took his

badge off him an' ordered him to take off his uniform an' go home— An' the Judge got him when he was drunk an' sore ag'in' me, an' what did he do, d' you think? Got him to make a charge ag'in' Robb! Got him to ambush my boy—a dead comrade's son."

He sprang to his feet. "Here!" he said. "Here! Here I was, with Cap Bestor an' Jim Bishop an' the boys—just after we 'd been welcomin' the Boggsville Post, an' was all goin' into supper— Here I was just at the door into the dancin', when I seen Judge Andrews comin' in. An' that reminded me 'bout the check fer four hundred I was t' announce. An' I told him I was goin' to make the announcement right after supper. An' he says, 'Since you speak publicly o' this matter, Mister Bigelow,' he says, 'I want to say that when I contributed I was led to do so under a false impression.'

"An' ordered him to take off his uniform an' go home—"

"Well, I could n't make no sense out o' that. I says, 'You 'll have to speak plainer, Judge,' I says. An' he says, 'How could I complete a payment when I don't believe the G. A. R. had any funds in the City Bank t'-day?' "

"That looked like some one 'd been playin' a joke on him, an' I laughed at him. So did Jim. So did Cory. 'Well,' I says, 't'-morrow I 'll show you.'

" 'I doubt it,' he says. 'I doubt it. As Senior Vice,' he says, "I 'll prove t'-morrow mornin' that the G. A. R. money that young Robert Bigelow took over to the bank is missin'!'

"Well, I could n't make nothin' out of it, unless the bank 'd been robbed. An' then I seen by the look in his eyes that he meant something ag'in' Robb. I seen it in the way he looked at me—as much 's to say, 'Take *that*, now. That 's fer *you*.' An' I says, 'Judge Andrews,' I says, 'you can

"If they had n't 'a' held me back, I 'd 'a' wrung his neck"

attack *me*. You al'ays have,' I says, 'but that boy— You keep yer hands off *him!* D' you *hear!* He 's my boy! Don't you accuse that boy!' "

He was trembling with passion, shaking a venomous forefinger at Smiffen. "I knew what he 'd got ag'in' Robb, an' I told him so. 'I know what you got ag'in' him,' I says. 'I know.' An' he hollers, 'Then if you know, *you* keep yer boy away from my house, an' away from me an' mine.' He 'dmitted it. He 'dmitted it in them very words. Ev'ry one could see. I told 'em it was 'cause Robb loved his daughter. So anything to injure him. Any mean, contem'tible— An' I says, 'Boys,' I says, 'I propose we give this man back his money. Give him back his God.' 'Yes,' they says. 'Give it back to him. We can raise it in some more respectable way.' An' then he out with it. 'As you will,' he says, 'but you 'll find that yer son has robbed—'

"By God, if they had n't 'a' held me back, I 'd 'a' wrung his neck. By—"

"Wesley! Wes'!" Letitia cried, running in to the sound of his angry voice. "Why, Wes'! What—"

"Go inside now, Letitia," he said, controlling himself. "I feel I 'm goin' to use language."

She caught his arm. "Nonsense, Wes'," she said. "Stop it. The boys are comin'. The boys are comin' up the road. Listen."

They listened. They could hear a chorus of untuned voices singing a canteen song.

Hallie rose hastily, and fled to an inner room to hide her tears. Bigelow said, "All right, 'Tish. I was jus' tellin' 'bout the Judge." And Smiffen studied his knuckles and tried to look as if he did not feel that he had been caught peeping at the family skeleton through a keyhole.

The arrival of "the boys" saved him from an uneasy situation.

VIII

THEY were as ancient a lot of "boys" as one could find "between here and heaven"—as Bigelow would say.

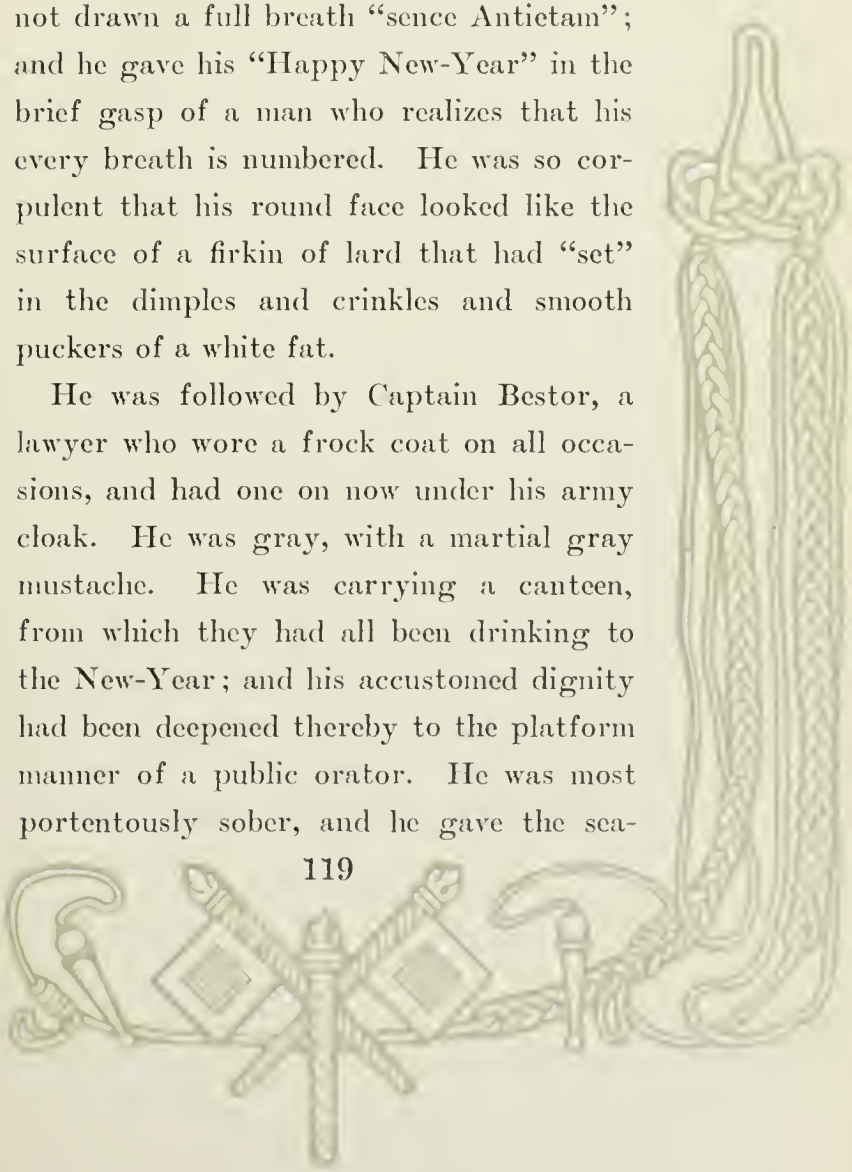
Jim Bishop, the secretary of the Post, who was town constable also, and clerk of the county court—Jim Bishop, who had been courting Letitia with an antique gallantry for twenty years—Jim Bishop came stumping in first, in his faded army overcoat, his hat in his hand, bald headed, crying "Happy New-Year, Wes'!" and "Happy New-Year, 'Titia!" as sprightly, in spite of his artificial leg, as a bridegroom of fifty, his plump face creased in smiles.

Behind him there puffed in a perfect whale of a man—Comrade Cory Kilbert—

Comrade Cory Kilbert

who had nearly starved to death in a Southern prison during the war, and who had been overeating four times a day every day since. It was his complaint that he had not drawn a full breath "sence Antietam"; and he gave his "Happy New-Year" in the brief gasp of a man who realizes that his every breath is numbered. He was so corpulent that his round face looked like the surface of a firkin of lard that had "set" in the dimples and crinkles and smooth puckers of a white fat.

He was followed by Captain Bestor, a lawyer who wore a frock coat on all occasions, and had one on now under his army cloak. He was gray, with a martial gray mustache. He was carrying a canteen, from which they had all been drinking to the New-Year; and his accustomed dignity had been deepened thereby to the platform manner of a public orator. He was most portentously sober, and he gave the sea-



son's greetings as solemnly as if it were a part of the ritual of some religious ceremony.

They had brought with them an old blind veteran named Hickman, an inmate of the soldiers' home at Knightstown; and they introduced him to Bigelow as "Hickman of the battle of Cedar Creek, the fellow who stole the cow an' saved our lives." And Bigelow—shaking hands with one, clapping another on the back, and raising his voice to a shout to wish the deaf Hickman the compliments of the day—received them with all the eager joviality of his simple soul, and made them "acquainted" with the smiling Sniffen as one might present a stranger to the boon companions of a club. "Boys! Boys!" he cried. "It does me good to see you! Hickman, you take me back twenty year! How are you, Hickman? I say *HOW ARE YOU?*" And Hickman, smiling blankly before him, lean-

"He was most portentously sober"

ing on his stick with one hand, the other behind his ear, answered in a voice that seemed to come across those twenty years, like a distant halloo, small and faint. "Oh, . . . prut-ty . . . well. Prut-ty . . . well."

Letitia had to find chairs for them all, and then bring them each a glass of "cherry bounce"; and when they had drunk her health, primly, in that precious beverage, Bigelow called to her to bring the old "volunteer flag" which she had been mending. "Goin' to show you the ol' flag," he shouted at Hickman. "Want you to teeh her. . . . It 's ready—ain't it, 'Tish—to go down to the hall? You can take it along, Cap."

They were taking Hickman to the hall; they could take the flag with them.

They stood, when Letitia appeared with the striped bundle in her arms. "Handle her gentle, 'Tish," Bigelow cautioned her. "She 's gettin' worn."

She spread it on the table top, and they saluted it mutely. Bigelow put the hem of it into Hickman's hands. The blind man said, in his far-away voice, "The ol' Indianny Sixteenth volunteer! Well, well. She 's good to the touch"; and bending his shaking old spine before it, he kissed it like an altar cloth.

"Robb's mother made it," Bigelow explained over his shoulder to Smiffen, "an' his father carried it. Color-Sergeant Ballard—killed at Five Forks."

"Marched right ahead o' me," Jim Bishop added proudly.

Bigelow cried in Hickman's ear, "D' you remember the color-sergeant—Phil Ballard?"

"Ah!" Hickman wagged his sparse beard. "'Member the day we found him—at Five Forks—near dawn?" His blind eyes seemed fixed on that dead past.

"Yes. Yes," Bigelow said. "A-steppin'

"The ol' Indianny Sixteenth volunteer!"

over bodies like cobblestones. Found him layin' with his head on his arms—an' in his pocket a letter from Robb's mother—sayin' she was waitin' with the baby fer him—Robb."

They nodded. "Yes. Yes. That 's it."

"Spoke to him purty sharp, rec'llect?" Bigelow said, trying to smile at himself now for not having understood that the man was dead. "Reminded him he had a boy at home. Begged him to get up. . . . Well, well. An' to think it all happened so long ago! An' him layin' there dead, in his blood-stained unyform!"

He turned to Smiffen with a determined cheerfulness. "Wish you 'd been over to the hall the openin' night," he said.

That set them all recalling the glories of that famous night; and they chaffed Jim Bishop on his dancing and Captain Bestor on his speech. ["On this memorable and momentous occasion—which marks the open-

"On this memorable and momentous occasion"

ing of this imposing edifice—which now lifts its stately cupola into the cerulean sky," etc. "An' there warn't no cupola," Cory Kilbert explained to Smiffen. "An' there warn't no such sky," said Bigelow.] They even tried to make Letitia recite again the verses which she had composed in the Post-Commander's honor, and delivered herself that evening in the costume of Columbia, with a liberty cap on her thin locks.

["Welcome to this festal hall
Soldiers marching to and fro!
Welcome townsfolks, one and all,
And Post-Commander Bigelow"—

and so forth, through half a dozen stanzas of which every last line ended in "Post-Commander Bigelow!"]

"Well," Captain Bestor said, "there may be finer halls, but—"

"But there *ain't*," said Kilbert; and Bestor brought them to their feet again to drink to the luck of the hall.

"Friends and comrades," he said oratorically, "it is now my privilege to say that it is the unanimous opinion of this Post that our new hall needs the honored presence of one who has not been seen there since our opening night, to the success of which he so largely contributed, our ex-Post-Commander, Mr. Wesley Bigelow. It is my privilege to say, on behalf of the comrades of this Post—"

"Boys. Boys," Bigelow cut in modestly. "I appreciate— I—I can't thank you. But—but— Well, mebbe when Robb comes back. I—I can't face the place yet."

"Well, now that Pettingill 's been expelled," Bishop argued, "an' the Judge 's left town, there 's no one there but what took the boy's part!"

"It ain't that," Bigelow said. "You don't know. You 're all right, boys. I can never thank y' enough fer what you did fer

"Soldiers marching to and fro!"

Robb. G. A. R. blood 's thicker 'n water. . . . It ain't *that*."

He began to shake hands with them all, to express the gratitude that choked him; and they accepted the action as a signal to go. They took Smiffen with them, to show him the hall; and when they had all trooped out (Captain Bestor whispering confidentially that he would be back, that he had something to say for Bigelow's private ear), the old stage driver sat down and sighed and shook his head.

IX

"IT ain't that," he said to himself. "It ain't that."

It was something that had happened between the boy and him, on the night of the opening of the new hall—something that had made the hall such a place of sickening memories to him that he could not face it—something that kept coming back to the eye of memory with a hypnotic vividness, in moments of solitude, to torture him with all the miseries of shame and remorse.

It came back upon him now; and sunken in his chair he stared at it, pale, sick at heart, like a man haunted. He went through it all again, incident by incident. He wiped

his forehead. He shifted in his chair and half groaned to himself.

"Mary's boy!" he whispered. "Mary's boy!"

For it was on that night of the opening of the hall, in the "Commandery Room"—with its flags and bunting, its lemonade stand and its oil lamps in brackets, its memorial tablet on the wall and its rack of muskets in the corner—it was there that Judge Andrews had made his accusation against the unfortunate Robert, just at the door that opened into the dance-room; and Bigelow, dragging the men who tried to hold him, had backed the Judge across the room towards the entrance, shouting: "You 're lyin'! He 's lyin', boys! He 's lyin'!"—his neck outstretched, his teeth bared, his face purple with anger—furious enough to have bitten if the men clinging to him had let him get near enough to the Judge to bite.

"Don't be apprehensive, gentlemen," the Judge had said, though he was pale. "I 'm a cool man on the battlefield as well as—"

"Yes," Bigelow yelled. "You 're so cool on the battlefield you just shiver. . . . No! No!" he told the men who tried to coax him away. "The good name of my boy 's been questioned, an' I never side-flank trouble. He 's got my blood a-singin', an' he 'll have to eat his crow!"

They hurried the women out of the room, and he tore himself free from the men who tried to hold him. "Close that door!" he ordered. "Now!" he challenged the Judge. "Now. Come on!"

The Judge said: "Call young Bigelow." And going himself to the door of an outer room, he summoned Pettingill.

"Call my boy!" Bigelow cried, and settling his coat on his shoulders—it had been almost dragged from his back—he confronted, sternly, in his old uniform, the

staggering Quartermaster whom Andrews brought up to support his case.

"As Senior Vice," the Judge said, "I have advised Pettingill to press this charge." And Pettingill, with the butt of a bar-room cigar in the snarling corner of his mouth, mumbled defiantly: "Feel the mor'l respons'bility bein' treasur' one thousan' dollars 'n forty-sev' cents."

Bigelow passed them over with a contemptuous glance, and turned to the door through which he expected to see Robert appear.

Kilbert undertook the boy's defence. "I propose a vote o' confidence in Wes' Bigelow's boy," he said, "before he opens his mouth."

"Yes. Yes," the others seconded him.

"Thanks, comrades," Bigelow replied, with a ring in his voice, "but mine 's a boy can stan' up an' face anybody. Anybody an' ev'rybody! He ain't needin' no defendin'. Look at him. Come here, Robb."

Robert had entered with Captain Bestor. He was a shabby lad in snuff-colored clothes which he had outgrown; and he was pale and frightened, though he did not know yet what was wanted of him.

Bigelow went to him and put an arm about his shoulders and led him forward.

"Robert," he said, when they were facing Andrews, with the men grouped around them, "the Judge says that you—" He swallowed and tried to smile apologetically at the circle. "Well, I 'm ashamed to tell it."

Bestor offered, in his best professional manner: "Perhaps I—"

Bigelow waved him off, and patted Robert on the shoulder to reassure him. The boy was already hanging his head. "My boy," he said, "stan' up an' face Judge Andrews an' answer. You deposited the Post funds in the City Bank."

Robert took one seared look at the stern

accusation of the Judge's scowl, and said: "I—Dad—"

"Speak so ev'rybody can hear you," Bigelow ordered confidently.

"Speak out, my boy," Captain Bestor helped.

But the unhappy boy, shrinking from a confession before all these strangers, trying vainly to hide his guilty face from them and make his voice reach his father only, gulped "Dad"—and stuck on the word.

"Young man!" the Judge said sternly.

"Hol' on!" Bigelow interfered. He caught the boy by both shoulders and shook him affectionately, turning himself at the same time to face the circle of eyes before which Robert quailed. "I ought n't to 've asked him so sudden. Got him frightened most to death. He can't stan' by an' hear his integrity questioned. He 's a sensitive boy."

He was fond enough to believe what he

Post-Commander Bigelow

said; and the others tried to look as if *they* believed him—all except the Judge and Pettingill.

"Did you, or did you not," the Judge began. And Pettingill threatened drunkenly: "My duty to press a charge ag'in' him shortage—an' I 'll *do* it!"

Bigelow upheld the boy with an arm about him, patting him and smiling a determined reassurance. "You don't have to answer till you 're ready, Robert. No one here doubts you at all. Take yer own time, my boy."

But the boy, his arms hanging limp, his knees visibly weakening under him, his chin on his chest, could not raise his eyes from his feet; and the Judge said impatiently: "Come, come. I simply want a yes or no."

"You don't have to answer till you 're ready," Bigelow counseled him. "Just speak up an' tell the Judge."

And at last the boy faltered, in a voice

that trembled and cringed before them all: "I can't, Dad. I did n't put it in the bank. I—"

In the amazed silence that ensued, Bigelow stood back with his mouth open, speechless. The comrades looked at one another. The Judge smiled.

"Well," Bigelow said hoarsely, "if you 've been disobeyin' orders—leavin' funds layin' aroun' the house—"

"A bad business, I 'm afraid," the Judge interposed, in a tone of cold finality.

"Well, *I 'm* responsible," Bigelow flared up. "*I 'm* responsible!" And the Judge turned his back—ignoring him—and took Pettingill by the elbow, and stalked off, righteous and vindicated.

"Boys, go inside," Bigelow turned to the others. "I 'll have better news fer you later."

They offered, if there was "anything" they could do—

"No. No," he assured them, struggling to keep a brave face. "There 's nothin' really wrong, I guess."

But when they had all gone into the dancing-room, and shut out the sound of the music as they closed the door behind them, he dropped his faltering smile, and turned to Robb the worried and miserable face of an old man disgraced. His shoulders drooped dejectedly: he wiped his face in his handkerchief; and seeing a kitchen chair under the balcony near where Robert stood, abandoned to his guilt, he dragged himself wearily to the seat and called the boy over to him.

"Robert," he said plaintively, "if you 've been careless an' lost this money takin' it over, why did n't you come to me like a man an' say so? 'T ain't as though you 'd did any delib'rate wrong. Then I could 'a' found some way to help you out. Now I ain't got time to turn round."

The boy hung his head, his shoulders stiff with the effort to keep down the sobs that gathered against his heart, looking down at the hat which he kept turning and turning in his hands.

"Now. What 's happened?"

But overcome by a realization of his irretrievable guilt and ruin, unable to confess the hopelessness of his situation to his father, Robert could only answer in the flat voice of despair: "It would n't do any good to tell you now, Dad."

"Robert!" Bigelow said huskily. "We got to keep cool-headed an' find some way to recoverin' it. . . . You lost it takin' it over. That 's it; ain't it?"

The boy gasped: "It 's gone."

"Gone where 't can't be got back?"

"Yes."

At that strained voice of hopelessness, Bigelow licked his dry lips, and wiped the back of his neck, and struggled with his

"Who 's got it? Answer me!"

anger—and then cried: "Who 're you shieldin'? Some seamp 's led you on. Who is it?"

The boy shook his head, too weak to do more.

"Who 's got it? Answer me!"

He could not answer; he was struggling against a sob that stuck in his throat, strangling him.

"*An*-swer me!" Bigelow screamed in the high cracked voice of impotent old rage and grief.

The boy gulped, trembling.

"Answer me," he gasped, and beat on his knee with his fist, his face convulsed with wrath and tears. And in a low voice, at the end of his self-control: "Answer—"

"I—I can't," he sobbed, unable to confess himself alone in his guilt. "I can't."

"You *will*," Bigelow cried, "fer I 'll *make* you. Whoever 's to blame has got to take his punishment. You answer me."

"Oh, *Dad!*" the boy wept. "I *can't*." He

dropped his hat and burst into tears, wiping his eyes frantically with his hands and with his bony wrists that protruded from the sleeves of his jacket—which he had outgrown. His father, his anger gone on the instant, rose to thrust the handkerchief into his hands. "Here," he said. "Here, now. You tell me who it is."

He sat down, drawing the boy between his knees. "It 's a sharper. I can see that." He shook Robert affectionately by the elbows. "Now, like a good boy," he wheedled. "You 're shieldin' some one. Now . . . now tell me. Like a good boy. . . . Now. Now, like a good boy."

And Robert, his face hidden in the handkerchief—unable to realize anything but that he had taken the money to speculate with—sobbed: "Oh, *Dad*. Can't you see it could n't be any one but me."

"You ain't meanin'—Oh no—" He shook his head. "A boy's whole nature can't

change like that." He looked up piteously into the face of the miserable youth. "Look at me."

Robert tried to look at him, but could not; and with his eyes fixed on the handkerchief which he was pulling and tugging at nervously, he pleaded: "I did n't mean to take it for good, Dad. I wanted to make some money—and I used it."

Bigelow sank down slowly in his chair, shrinking in upon himself as if all his pride, all his strength—as if his very breath—were leaving him. "You used it!" He put his hands up to his temples. "God A'mighty!" His voice was scarcely more than a dry rustle in his throat. "Mary 's boy!" And then, rising unsteadily, with his underjaw shaking weakly as he stood to face the terrible truth, he quavered: M-mary's boy! . . . an' yer father's name up there on that tablet. You stole from the comrades of my—You—You 're a—"

"No, no!" the boy cried. "I 'm *not!* I meant to pay it back!"

But Bigelow beat down his protests with a violent: "You 're a thief! A common thief! There ain't a man in this hall but 's got the right to have you locked up. Judge Andrews 's got the right to sentence you like a dog. An' you not able to hold up yer head."

The boy had huddled himself up under this attack, shivering horribly. Bigelow caught him by the shoulders and swung him round. "Come here! How 'd you come to do it?"

"I—I don't know. I just did it."

Bigelow dropped his hand. The tears flooded his old eyes and trickled down to the corners of his mouth—his distorted mouth with its protruding underjaw that shook with a hysteria of grief and shame. "My—my boy!" he said, heart-broken. "My wonderful boy! 'S turned out a thief.

"Take that, you— "

. . . Have n't I been good to you? Have n't I, Robb? Why did n't you come an' ask me fer what you wanted? You did n't have to do this. All I got—an' all I could raise—'t ain't much, but it 's yourn." He stretched out his hands. "Ever since you was put in my arms, I 've done the best I could fer you. I—"

"Dad!" the boy broke down at the sound of his father's sobs. "Don't! *Don't!* I can stand anything but that." He dropped into the chair and put his head on his arms. "Oh, for *God's sake*—"

Bigelow looked down at him. "Well, I 've been a bungler!" he cried. "An ol' bungler! Ev'rybody was right. I never learnt you right from wrong. An' here you are now—where music an' dancin' 's goin' on—ashamed to face an honest comrade." He drew himself up. "Well, I 've ruined you with kindness. Now—" He clenched his teeth. "Get up," he said hoarsely.

Robert did not move.

"Get up!" he snarled, through his teeth. "Get up when I tell you!" And clutching the boy by the coat collar he dragged him to his feet.

"T-take off yer coat. *Take it off!*"

The boy drew the coat from his shoulders and let it slide from his arms to the floor.

Bigelow pointed to a stack of carriage whips, tagged, in a barrel by the door, where their owners had left them when they had put up their horses and come into the hall. "Bring me one o' those whips!" His outstretched arm trembled with an old man's passion. "Get it!"

The boy got it.

"You little—D' you know what I 'm goin' to do?" He snatched the whip and shook it. "I 'm g-goin' to flog you," he shouted, "till I hain't got strength to flog you no longer. Take that, you—"

He swung the whip. It whistled as it cut

"I 'll stan' by you"

the air and came down with a pitiless lash on the boy's shoulders.

He quivered under it but held stiff; and turning his mute face to his father, he looked at him without a word.

Without a word—but with the eyes of the dead, with the eyes of his mother. And Bigelow let the whip fall from his hand and faltered: "Mary's boy! I 've struck you." He threw his arms about him, as if he would cure with his embrace the wound of that cut on the shoulders; and gathering the boy to him, he sobbed: "I 'll stan' by you, Robb. I 'll stan' by you."

X

IT was this scene—it was this grief—that confronted the tender old sentimentalist whenever he thought of the new hall. He could not bear to see the place where he had turned on guilty innocence and struck it with a whip. It seemed to him that the spirit of the boy's mother must have seen him and shuddered. It was as if his whip had fallen on her very shoulders, since the boy had always been to him visibly *her* flesh and something of her soul. And now that Robert had gone, with the sting of the lash on his back as the last memento of his foster-father's love, Bigelow felt as if he had maltreated a child on its death-bed; and he hated himself and loathed the memory of the Commandery Room with a

passionate self-horror that woke him in his bed to long hours of sleepless remorse and persecuted him even in his uneasy dreams.

What had happened since that night had only served to make the boy seem more the innocent martyr—more the persecuted victim of circumstances—more guilelessly forgivable and over-punished. And Bigelow accused himself the more bitterly because, when every one else had turned against the lad, he too had failed Robert instead of defending him, right or wrong.

"Hallie," he told the girl—when she came into the room after the departure of Smiffen and the veterans, and found him alone with such thoughts as these—"Hallie, us parents has a hard time knowin' what to do. We got to sit in judgment-like on our children an'—an' we 're afraid to spoil 'em by not punishin' 'em—an' all the time, mebbe, we ought to be defendin' an' helpin' 'em. I been thinkin' that the Judge now—

p'raps he done what he thought was best. Mebbe he 's missin' you. You ought n't to be too hard on a father, Hallie."

"Mr. Bigelow," she replied, with all the hardness of her inexperience, "my father did wrong to Robb and he knows it. At first I thought he would undo it, and I waited. And when he left town and went to Indianapolis, because people here would n't speak to him on the streets, I went with him and tried to make him do something to make it right—and he would n't. He knows he has done wrong. He *knows* it. But he 's too proud to do anything to let people think so!"

"Mebbe it was an impulse," Bigelow tried to excuse him, thinking of his own action. "Mebbe he did it before he thought."

"No!" she cried. "No! He made up his mind to do it, that night—after he found out what Robert had done—after we came home from the Hall. He said Robert was

a thief, and I told him—I told him how it happened—that Robert did n't understand —that he had n't meant to steal. And he would n't believe me. He said Robert had n't told me the truth. And when I told him I would never give Robert up, he said he would never have his daughter marry a thief—and he sent me to my room, and got Mr. Wellman, and they were together in the library until it was nearly morning. I was watching at my window when he went away. I was afraid—but I did n't think they 'd dare. I did n't think they *could*."

"No," Bigelow said. "Ner me!"

"And next morning, when he called me down to breakfast, and I would n't eat anything, he watched me, but he did n't say anything; and I knew his mind was made up to do something, but I did n't know what it was. I thought it was just that he intended to have Robert disgraced by having him brought into court. And I told him

"He could n't tell me anything"

again that I did n't care *what* he did, I would n't give Robert up. And he did n't say anything. And that frightened me more than ever. And when he went away to his office, I ran around the other way, and came here to tell you they were going to do something, and there was no one here—"

"I was out raisin' the money," Bigelow said, in the manner of a man recalling the inevitability of fate. "They 'd told me that Pettingill was n't goin' to press the charge. They 'd been up all night with him. I was here with Robb when they came an' told me it 'd be all right if I 'd raise the money."

"And so," she hurried on, breathlessly, "when there was no one here I ran down to the Court House, and I could n't find anyone but the janitor—Mr. Kilbert—and he could n't tell me anything except that the whole Post had been up all night. Then Mr. Wellman came in, and I knew it

would n't be any use to ask him, but I *did*. And he tried to get out of it by saying he represented the District Attorney and could n't 'venture an opinion'; and he tried to put me off by saying it was n't very 'flattering' to him that I should prefer Robb, and I saw he was hiding it—what they intended to do—and I saw he was trying not to smile to himself when he looked at his watch. And when I told *him*, too, that no matter what they did I 'd never change to Robb, he said 'Oh, I think you will. I think you will,' and went away to the Grand Jury room. And then I knew they 'd do it. And that 's when I wrote the note to Robb that you gave him; and then I ran out again to try to find you or some one. And—" .

She sat down, biting her lips to keep back the tears. Bigelow had been pacing up and down heavily. He stopped to pat her on the shoulder. "They could n't 'a'

"He tried to get out of it"

done nothin' if it had n't been fer Pettingill," he said, as if that excused her father. "Never mind, Hallie. You done yer best. You got nothin' to regret. *You* never turned on the boy— Well, it 's hard to know what to do when you 're a parent. I s'pose the Judge thought he was doin' what was best. An' when you owe a man a grudge, like he owed *me*—"

"I 'll never forgive him," she said. "Never!"

She had set her pretty mouth in a tight-lipped determination. Her expression reminded him of her father. "Well, well," he said, "don't let 's talk about it."

He turned to the garden window where the afternoon sun was beaming in strongly, and the frost was melting on the panes. He scratched at a translucent film of ice with his forefinger, reflectively. "He 's like his father—Robb is," he said. "Some boys 're that way. . . . His father now—I remem-

ber when Mary met him. I seen I had no chance with her after that. She 'd 'a' done anythin'—gone anywhere—with him. . . . Well, that 's the way it is. . . . I mind old Woods askin' me if I thought I was drivin' a hearse. I was mighty glad when the war broke out an' I could get away from here." He shook his head over it, smiling ruefully; and then, catching sight of a moving figure down the road, he said: "Here 's Cap Bestor comin' back with— Oh, it 's Mr. Smiffen. Don't go, Hallie. Set where you are."

XI

IT was apparent at once—when Smiffen entered—that he had heard something to fill him with amazement. His eyes showed it; he showed it in the way he withdrew himself into the background of Bestor's meeting with Hallie, and looked blinkingly at Bigelow and turned from him to study the girl. There was not only amazement—there was an indignant incredulity in his expression, as if these two had been the victims of some impossible injustice of which he knew the bare outline but was eager to hear the details. And he sat down on the edge of a chair impatiently, to wait until Bestor was quiet, so that he might ask the questions that were trembling on his lips.

Bestor was cautiously insinuating to Bigelow and the girl that he had had a letter, an inquiry from an important person, some days before, and that he confidently expected—and he believed that he had "good grounds to confidently expect"—that something would be done about Robert. He had not mentioned the matter before; he had kept it a secret, because, he said, he had not wished to raise any false hopes.

Unfortunately it was obvious that his more rosy view of the matter was due now to the influence on his spirits of a New Year's celebration and a convivial canteen. Bigelow glanced at the girl, to see that she understood the situation; and then he wrung Bestor's hand with gratitude, if not with hope. "It 's all right anyhow, Cap," he said, forcing the lawyer into a chair. "You done yer best. Don't you worry. Set down. Set down."

"But I don't see how it happened," Smiffen blurted out. "A judge can't—"

"Well, he *did!*" Bigelow turned to him.

"But your lawyer—"

"*I* was counsel in the case," Bestor said, and drew himself up in his chair.

"It was n't him. It was Pettingill," Bigelow defended him. "We thought he was n't goin' to press the charge."

"He was influenced," Hallie said faintly, "by my father."

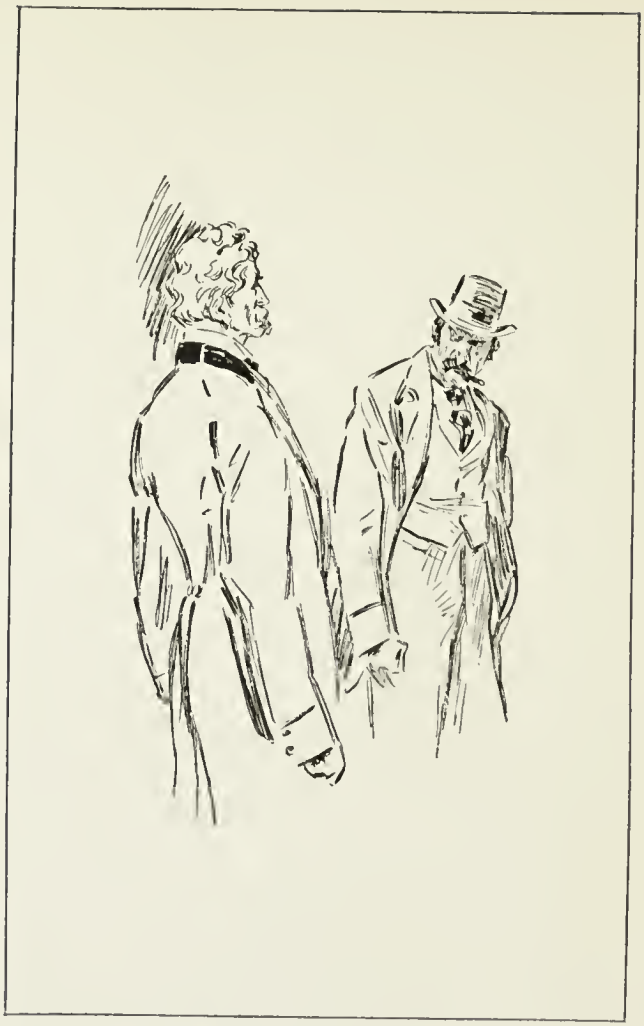
Bestor waved his hand, in the manner of authority. "Mr. Lester Pettingill was 'got at.' My legal instinct told me he 'd been got at. And when he came into the court-room that morning, I told him so. 'At dawn,' I said, 'you were in a very different frame of mind; and, on the strength of what you said *then*, I told Mr. Bigelow that if he could return the funds, you were willing to drop the charge.' And when he told me that I might talk to his lawyer, I

said to him: 'Mr. Pettingill,' I said, 'I stamp that assertion as a lie. There are n't but two lawyers in our community. I represent the boy. The other one, though not a comrade in *fact*, is a gentleman, and he has assured me that he would not appear in the case. I stamp your assertion as a lie, sir.' And he replied to the effect that young Wellman had advised him as to his duty, and he was determined to do it."

"There!" Hallie cried, at this confirmation of her own suspicions.

"But," Smiffen began impatiently.

Bestor stopped him with a legal forefinger. "Lester Pettingill was wearing his Sunday clothes—a significant fact to any one who knew Mr. Pettingill. He was chewing a cigar which he had not lighted. Significant! Significant!—He was prepared to appear before the Grand Jury. And when we asked him not to do so, 'out of pity for our Post Commander,' he replied



"I stamp that assertion as a lie"

that he did not see why he should pity the Post Commander—that the Post Commander had said he was in no condition to be trusted with the Post funds—that the Post Commander, on the night of the opening of our Hall, had made him take off his uniform, had threatened to have him put out of office, had taken from him his committee badge, had, in fact, as he said, 'disgraced' him. He had, he maintained, been persecuted in the Post—"

Smiffen interrupted this tedious explanation: "But the boy—"

"Nevertheless," Bestor went on, glaring at him, "I could see that Mr. Pettingill was by no means easy in his mind. I coaxed him to sit down. I had our comrades shut the door of the court-room. I gave him a fresh cigar. And then, taking a seat beside him, concealing my distaste for him, I said, 'Lester, my old friend, we have all been pressing you too hard. There 's really a

loyal and splendid side to your character, if people only knew how to appeal to it.' I soothed him. I appealed to him. 'Why,' I said, 'there 's Wes' out now, getting the last few dollars together, believing what you said this morning—happy—thinking the trouble 's all over.' And while I spoke, I saw his face soften. I saw him stop chewing his cigar. I said, 'I know you, Let. I know that at the last minute you 'll never stand against an old soldier.'

"Then I heard some one enter the court-room. It was Miss Letitia Grigsby. She was weeping, and I said to him: 'The tears of a woman—I know you, Let! The tears of a woman will break you, gallant comrade though you are.' "

He spread his hands eloquently. "Miss Grigsby did not understand the situation. When she saw him there she flew into a passion—justified, but impolitic. She abused him. I attempted in vain to silence

her. I defended him. She declared that he should have been able to look after his own funds—that it was 'all his fault'—that he was a 'miserable excuse for an old veteran.' She even reminded him that his war record was not clear—that he had run away at the battle of Wilson's Creek—that the whole Post knew it, though they *did* try to cover it up. All of which was true, but ill-timed. Unhappily, very ill-timed!

"And Pettingill replied that *now* he knew how he was discussed in the Post Commander's family. He asserted that *he* could see through the holes in a ladder—by which he meant that he understood I had been trying to get around him. He said that he had been deceiving us at daybreak—that the boy had taken the funds—and that the boy would have to pay the penalty. And while we were still arguing with him, to the best of our ability, he was summoned to attend before the Grand Jury; and, break-

"—— run away at the battle of Wilson's Creek"

ing away from our persuasions, he went to answer the call."

He folded his arms on his breast, with an air of defiantly inviting the impertinent stranger to cross-examine him. But in spite of his defiance, his eyes were uncertain in their focus, and he found it difficult to keep them fixed on Smiffen.

"But the boy had n't intended to *steal* the money," Smiffen argued.

"That 's what *I* said," Bigelow cried. "Why when I was a boy—I remember, once—when I was about *so* high—I took fifty cents from the wagon seat—rolled out o' my father's pocket. The same thing exactly! I went right out with it, an' saw a sign said 'Cherry Tarts.' Went an' paid it all over the bak'ry counter. An' just as I was goin' out with the bag, my father come in. 'Eat 'em!' he says. 'Eat 'em *all—now!*'" He made a wry face. "I can taste 'em yet whenever I think of it." He smiled

at them, pathetically. "Boys will be boys. Robb 'd—"

"And anyway," Smiffen cut in, "if you knew the Judge was prejudiced—"

"Mr. What's-your-name," Bestor rounded on him, "there is such a thing in Indiana as contempt of court."

"Well, here," Bigelow interfered, to stop a quarrel. "You don't understand the way things were." He rubbed his forehead, worried. "Cap Bestor explained it to me, when I come in with that money."

XII

"YOU see," he said, "when I 'd got the money I thought the trouble was all over, an' when I come into the court-room an' saw 'Tish cryin', *that 's* what I told her: that if she wanted somethin' to cry fer, she 'd better go out an' try to raise money in a hurry. The only thing that was worryin' me was about Robb, because he had n't eat nothin'. Would n't tech the sandwich I 'd bought him. . . . He was waitin' down in the hall, an' I sent 'Tish down stairs to try him with it again.

"Well, I set down to the table there an' was countin' the money again to make sure, when the Cap here set down beside me an' said somethin' about Pettingill pressin' the charge. I did n't get it at first, but when

I looked up at him I seen by his face that the trouble was still on."

He turned apologetically to Bestor. "I guess I was kind o' short with you, Cap. I thought you was too full o' the law. I thought if I could see Let I could put it to him, man to man. . . . An' then," he explained to Smiffen, "when I heerd Let was in the Gran' Jury room, I started in to order him out."

"Forgetting," Bestor added, "that you had no authority over Pettingill in the matter. Not in the Court."

"That 's right, Cap. That 's right. I did n't know which way to turn. I 'd been thinking about gettin' the money. Had n't thought of anything else. . . . An' I thought if I took the money into the Gran' Jury room an' showed it—"

"Nonsense. Nonsense," Bestor ruled.

"Well, there it was," Bigelow sighed. "There was n't no way o' stoppin' Pet-

tingill. An' the Cap said we 'd have to plead guilty."

"The boy had no case," Bestor said. "He had admitted to the Judge, in the Hall, that he was guilty. The Post check had come back marked 'No funds.' There was nothing to do but throw ourselves on the mercy of the Court."

Bigelow muttered: "The mercy o' John Andrews!"

"Well!" Smiffen objected. "Was n't there any way a lawyer could—"

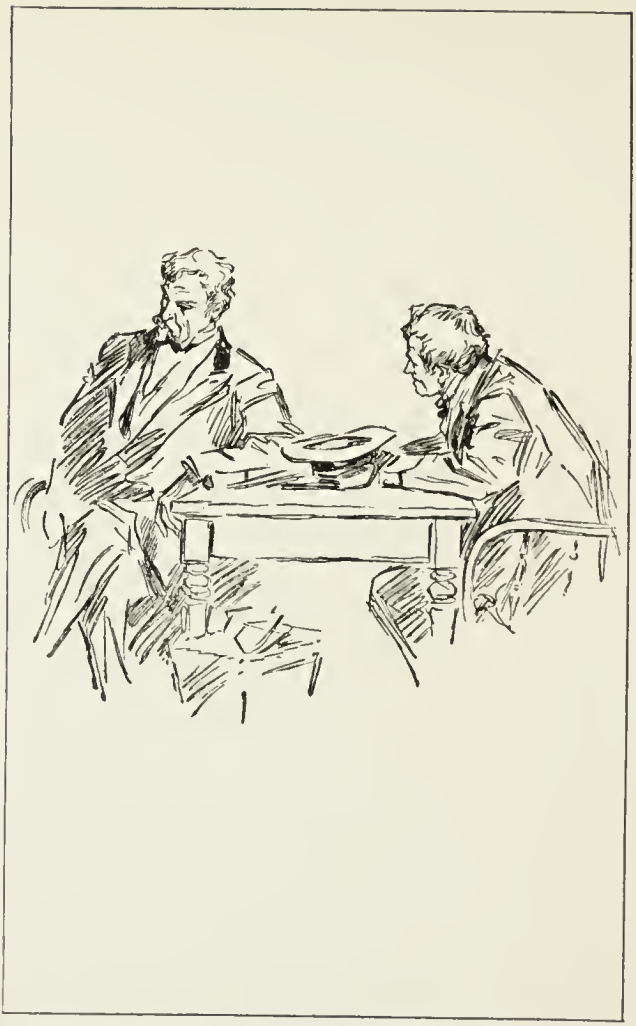
"That 's what *I* said!" Bigelow cried. "A Habeas Corpus er somethin'."

Bestor looked his disgust.

"Well, what 's the use o' havin' a lawyer if he can't lie out o' things," Bigelow complained.

"The boy himself," Bestor said, "could n't have lied out of it."

Bigelow sighed again, resignedly. "I wanted him to blame it on me. Sort o' say



"A Habeas Corpus"

I went to the city with Robb—er somethin' like that—an'—an' make out that—well that I spent the—the money."

"An insult to the intelligence of the Court! Wesley, Robert had made his bed—"

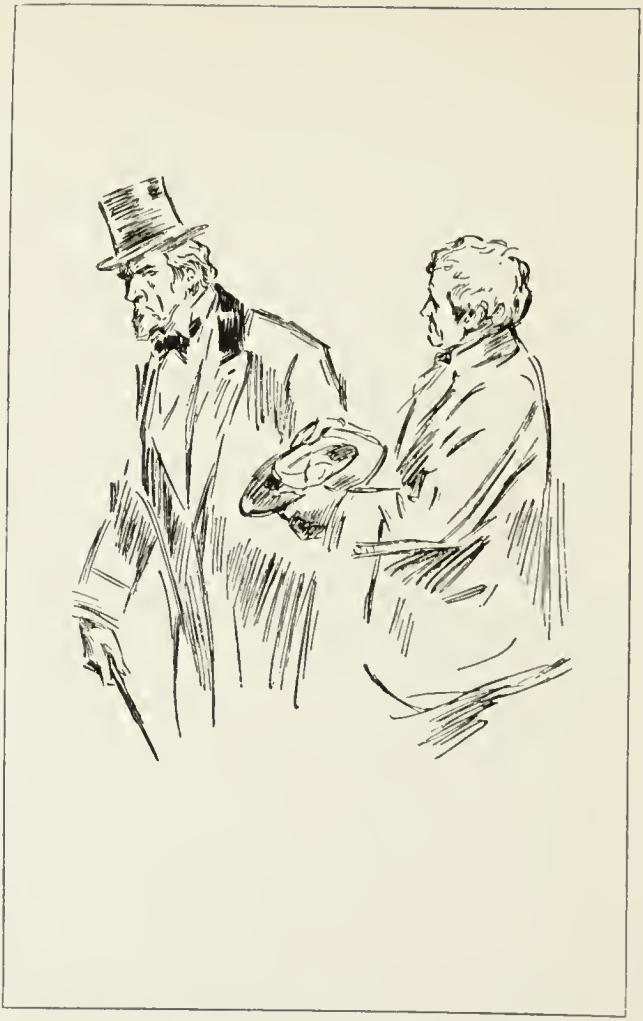
"Well, Cap, it was awful." He wiped his forehead, at the mere memory of that realization of his impotence. "To think we could n't do nothin' fer that boy!"

"There was nothing we could do but plead guilty."

Bigelow sat dejected. "It was awful. I did n't know what to do. When the Judge come in, I scooped the money into my hat an' held it out to him. Wanted him to know I had it. Asked him if he could n't fix it all up somehow. An' he said there warn't no charge ag'in' Robert before him yet. So *that* was no use."

"Certainly not," Bestor held.

"That 's where they *had* me," Bigelow



"Wanted him to know I had it"

said, piteously. "They had me in a game I did n't know nothin' about. An' ev'ry time I tried to do anythin' they said it was ag'in' the rules, an' stopped me. . . . I could n't make out what was goin' on, half the time—lot o' men comin' in, an' young Wellman sayin' somethin' about some papers he gave the Judge, an' the Judge sayin' somethin' an' tellin' 'em they could go—"

"That was the Grand Jury," Bestor explained, "making their returns. They had found a true bill in the case of the People *versus* Bigelow. There was nothing else for them to consider, so the Judge dismissed them."

"Yes. Yes. I heerd the Judge say somethin' like that. I did n't know what it was."

"And," Bestor took up the story, pompously, "the Judge, you will perhaps remember, announced that he would take the defendant's plea and proceed with the trial

at once. I immediately objected. I held that it was not customary to try a case in the same term as the presentment; and the Judge replied that he wished to clear his docket before his retirement, and this was his last day on the bench.

"What could we do? I argued that we were entitled to some time in which to prepare our defence. The prosecuting attorney, Mr. Wellman, immediately pointed out that, judging by the statements made by the defendant, we would require very little time to formulate our defence. Which was true! We had no defence. The Judge gave us until the afternoon session. There was nothing to be gained by protracting the suspense of the defendant's family. I did not suppose that Judge Andrews would allow his personal feelings to enter into his judgment. I elected to go to trial at once.

"The Judge ordered the defendant to be produced, so that the trial might proceed.

"Incompetent, irrelevant, immaterial"

Jim Bishop went for the boy, and Mr. Bigelow tried to explain—"

"I tried to explain the whole thing," Bigelow said. "I wanted to do it before Robb was brought up. I did n't see no necessity fer a trial at all."

"And Mr. Wellman," Bestor went on, "promptly and very properly objected that all this was 'incompetent, irrelevant, immaterial and not germane to the issue.' I rose. I said: 'Your honor, I must apologize, and —as counsel for the defendant—I am sure that he will enter a plea of guilty to the charge in the indictment. But I desire to say that this Post is anxious to have the matter settled amicably, and as we are prepared to make restitution, the ends of justice will be subserved by suspending sentence.' To which Mr. Wellman replied, 'There should be no suspension of sentence' —and the boy was brought in."

At the recollection of it, Bigelow

"Your honor, I must apologize"

groaned: "*My* boy!" There were tears in his eyes. "He had n't teched his sandwich," he said to Smiffen. "He had it in his hand, with the paper on it."

Smiffen felt his own eyes filling up. He looked away and shook his head.

Bestor had gone on, ponderously. "There was nothing that we could object to in the indictment. It had been correctly drawn. It deposed and set forth the known facts in the case without an error. I was compelled to plead guilty. 'Your honor,' I said, 'it is useless for me to dwell upon the circumstances leading up to this unfortunate affair. They are already familiar to you. This lad went to the city, and fell into the hands of a shrewd scoundrel who played upon his credulity. The lad has already learned a bitter lesson, and I am sure that your Honor will suspend sentence and reprimand him. I might urge further that his father's record be taken into consideration

as a private citizen and in the service of his country.' To which Mr. Wellman replied that there were no extenuating circumstances—that the breach of confidence of which the defendant was guilty was only made more serious by his father's implicit trust in him—that to discharge him with a reprimand would only encourage him in his vicious habits; that in vindication of the Post Treasurer, who had had 'the manly courage to press the charge,' and as an example to the youth of the community, the defendant should be punished to the full extent of the law.

"I could not take any legal exception to these remarks. His delivery was bad—his voice high—his manner jerky—and he showed unmistakable signs of personal animus against the defendant. But—"

"He was lyin'!" Bigelow cried. "He was lyin'. Robert never had no vicious habits." He had risen to his feet, his handkerchief

"His heart 's all right"

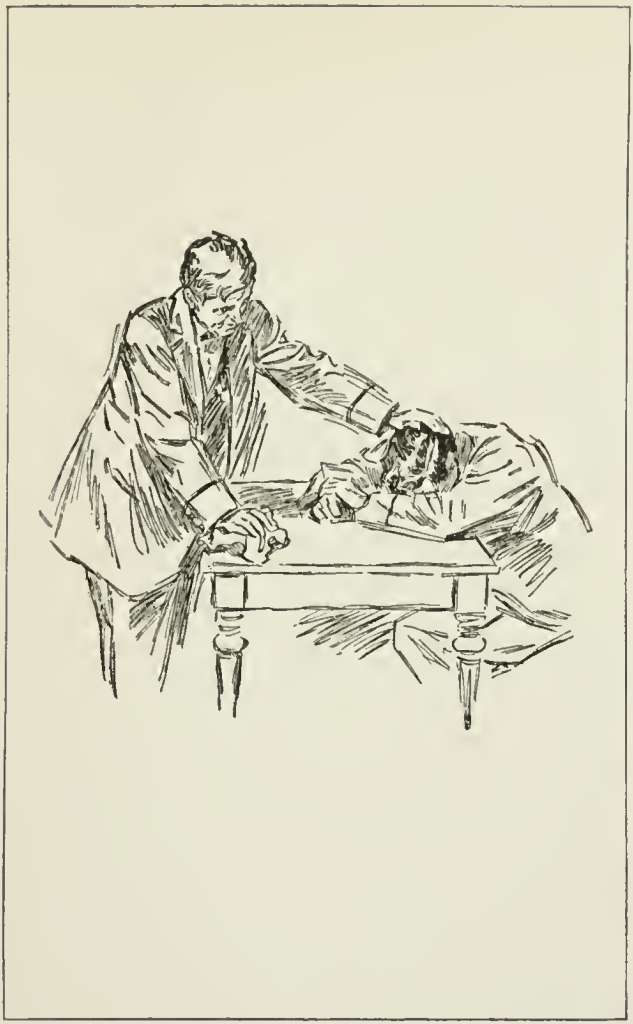
clutched in his hand, his face twitching with an emotion he could no longer control. "There he was, lyin' away my boy's char'cter—sneerin'—face like a—a— 'I 'm his father,' I says. 'I got a few remarks to say, Judge,' I says. 'I want to bring out some fac's that nobody knows but me.' " He waved his arm, speechless. "They had to let me. Extenuatin' circumstances. Nobody knowed but me . . . I says, 'You believe me, Judge,' I says, 'he 's a good boy. His heart 's all right. Ain't nothin' wrong about him at all,' I says. 'If you 'd only let him explain it to you in his own boy's way—like he did to me—it 'd make all the diff'rence in the world—' "

He gulped frantically, as if he felt himself fighting for the boy again and had to struggle to keep his old voice clear. "He—he tried to head me off. 'Con-confine yerself to the fac's,' he says. John Andrews! Mouth like a—'I 'm gettin' right at 'em,' I

says. 'Jus' tryin' to p'int out how easy it was fer anybody to deceive a boy who believes in ev'rybody yet. A boy that ain't had no bringin' up. *Me*—an ol' soldier—*I* brought him up!' "

He mopped his face desperately. "I could n't think o' nothin' to say. I—I ain't ust to thinkin'. I—he wanted to know somethin' about 'the support, er the support o' the home'—whether Robb 'd ever con-contributed to the support, er the support o' the home. I had him there! The boy had earned some money once an' come an' put it right into my hand. Had the whole Post there to prove it, did n't I, Cap? It was his first money! Jim Bishop, Cory Kilbert—they 'd all heerd about that five dollars. Had him there!

" 'You see, Judge,' I says, 'all this that 's happened to-day—it 's my fault 'cause he 's an orphan—an' after his father died—at Five Forks—he was only so big—just a



"An' Robb begun to cry"

little baby—an' his char'cter warn't formed —an' I ain't done well by him. There was so little of him we were sort o' scared of him—an' humored him too much—an' so I kep' puttin' off trainin' him,' I says, 'an' lettin' him be happy in his own little way—'cause a lost childhood can't never come back.'" His voice broke; he swallowed in a frenzied eagerness, his eyes staring like a child's in the attempt to utter what he had no words to express. "'An' the first thing I knowed,' I says, 'before I seen he needed serious advice, he—he shot up like a weed—an' suddenly he warn't a baby no longer. An' so,' I says,—'an' here he is to-day, before you, Judge,' I says—'a foolish boy, perhaps, but not a bad one—an orphan—but if you 'll overlook this, Judge,' I says, 'I 'll do better. I can't let my respons'bility end here. So—so don't,' I says—I was— An' Robb begun to cry. He broke down an'—an'—I could n't say nothin' more. It

got me—in the throat. I was n't ust to speakin'." He made a blind gesture of apology with his handkerchief, and turning suddenly—as Hallie, weeping too, sprang up to hurry to him—he stumbled out of the room, shaking his head spasmodically as if the recollection were an ache in the brain that tortured him.

XIII

"IT 'S a shame! A damn shame!" Smiffen muttered, wiping his eyes and blowing his nose.

Hallie sat down stiffly, trying to control her contorted lips, while the big tears rolled down her cheeks unheeded from eyes that saw nothing but that picture of her father sitting in judgment on the boy she loved.

Bestor had clenched his hand on the table top. "I knew it," he said, in a hushed voice, with something of the same fixed gaze as the girl. "I knew we 'd lost as soon as he began 'Young man, those interested in you may advance specious arguments in extenuation of your conduct.' I knew it. I knew it. But when he said 'in the Jeffersonville Peni-

"Jim Bishop had the worst—to take him away from Wes'"

tentiary—one year at hard labor,' I could n't believe my ears. State's Prison!"

At the words "Jeffersonville Penitentiary," Smiffen had started and frowned and looked up at the ceiling and down at the floor, as if searching his memory for something he had almost found again. Suddenly he said "Ah!" with raised eyebrows, his face alight.

Bestor had gone on. "I could n't believe my ears. State's Prison! For that *boy!*" He wagged his old head, commiseratingly. "Jim Bishop had the worst—to take him away from Wes'. God! I thought Wes' would go mad. . . . I 've seen men die, on the battlefield, in the hospital. I 've had them cling to my sleeve and fight for another breath. It was worse than that. I thought it 'd shake the heart out of his body. He ran after the Judge. I had to hold him—fighting—fighting like a drowning man!"

He put his hands up, closing his eyes, his lips compressed in an expression that said the thing was beyond words. The girl sobbed.

He sighed and shook his head. "Wes' was right. No judge had a right to take a boy's future and throw it away like that. It 's law, but it 's not justice. Judge Andrews did that out of personal spite. It 's a hard thing to say of the bench—Why!" He turned to Hallie. "Why, even young Wellman had n't expected it! He as much as told me so before he went back to Indianapolis."

She did not reply; and they were sitting in silence—Smiffen fidgetting with a desire to speak, but compelled to wait a decent interval—when Bigelow, having regained control of himself, came back from the dining-room, looking old and bent.

He sat down to stretch his trembling hands out to the stove. "A man lives an'

"I thought Wes' would go mad"

learns," he said. "When I went to the war, I 'd lost all int'rest in life. Did n't care what happened to me. . . . An' then, fightin' and marchin' an' sleepin' with the boys, I seen what life really was—what makes it—with comrades like that. It was good. I could 'a' gone on that way ferever. . . . An' when it was over, I come back here with a new feelin'—among neighbors—workin' shoulder to shoulder, with Robb at home here—an' havin' no hard feelin's to nobody. . . . An' then, that day in court, I thought it 'd been all wrong. It all turned ag'in' me. There was the law I 'd fought fer—an' the court! I 'd help make 'em. I 'd gone out with my gun an' defended 'em. An' they turned on me an' took Robert—took ev'rythin'. An' made Jim Bishop do it. An' made all the boys stan' by an' see it done." He turned shakily to Bestor. "That 's why I took off my medals, Cap. I was done with it all. There warn't nothin' more in it fer me."

"It 's law, but it 's not justice"

Bestor nodded. He had understood.

"An' then the boys all come to offer what they could—Jim Bishop with his pension money, eight dollars a month—an' ev'ry one helpin'—drivin' Judge Andrews out o' town an' Pettingill after him—an' nobody pressin' me to pay my debts." He threw out a hand at them. "I tell you what it is. Human nature 's better 'n its laws—better 'n its courts—better 'n anythin'. 'S all right, Cap. We all done our best. Robb 'll be back some day. I ain't complainin'." He smiled up bravely. "We 'll come out all right."

Smiffen seized his opportunity. "Mr. Bigelow," he said eagerly, "when I first heard your boy's name, I remembered that I 'd seen it in print somewhere. I used to know a boy named Robert Bigelow at school. And when I saw the name I wondered if it was a son of his. That 's how I noticed it. And just now, when Captain

—well, I remembered, just now, that I read it in a Jeffersonville paper, on the train. It was a news item from the penitentiary. It said your boy had applied for a patent on a spring bolt—"

"What? There!" Bigelow cried. "What 'd I tell you? Eh? . . . 'Tish!" he called. "'Tish!"

Letitia came running in from the kitchen.

"Robb 's patented—tell her! Go on. Tell her. I want to hear it again."

"I was telling Mr. Bigelow," Smiffen explained, "about an item I saw in a Jeffersonville paper—on the train. It said that 'young Robert Bigelow,' in the prison there, had applied for a patent on a spring bolt—"

"There! Did n't I al'ays tell you? Printin' presses an' paint were n't possible where he is, so he works patient Sundays on his little bolt." He looked up at the boy's picture, erect and proud. "Robert

Bruce an' the spider—that 's what that boy is! Might as well lock up a streak o' lightnin'."

The others clamored for further details, but Smiffen could remember none—except that there was something in the item that had struck him as amusing—something about Robert having given the option on the patent to a "contractor of great political influence" who was also serving out a sentence in the prison.

He swallowed his smile apologetically when he saw that *they* did not find anything amusing in the matter.

Bigelow had remained gazing fondly at the picture. "Wonderful boy!" he said. "You could tell he was a genius—he was so modest!"

Smiffen held out his hand, sincerely moved. "Mr. Bigelow," he said, "I want to congratulate you. I was never gladder of

anything in my life. I 'm proud to be the one to bring the news. And I want to say I 'm—I 'm proud to know you. I 'm glad I met you."

Bigelow grasped his hand, smiling a crooked smile. "You ought to know *Robb*. Wish he 'd been here. Eh, Cap? Eh, Hallie? Well, this may be the turnin' p'int in Robb's career. What 'd I al'ays tell you?" And then, beaming with relief, turning to Letitia, he cried: "What time is it, 'Tish? Ain't it near supper time? I 'm as hungry as a horse? Come on. Let 's have somethin' t' eat."

She did not wait to hear anything more. She had been so worried by his lack of appetite at dinner, that she hurried away at once, with an almost maternal delight, to prepare the meal—although it was more than an hour from supper time.

"I feel as if I could eat, now," Bigelow

laughed. "Stay to supper with us, Cap. Come on."

But Bestor had still some New Year's calls to pay with the Post members; and he went—with a slap on the back from Bigelow—to carry the good news to the "comrades." "Happy New Year, Wes'," he said. "Eh?"

Bigelow dug his hands into his pockets, delightedly. "Oh, our troubles 'll soon be over now, Cap. Two er three months more—countin' time fer good behavior. It won't take long to wipe this all off the slate. He 's a wonderful boy!" He turned to Hallie when the captain had gone. "We 'll soon be payin' off all our debts, an' ownin' our own roof once more. Startin' out fresh in life. I feel good fer forty years yet. Jus' beginnin' t' enjoy life. Eh?"

"Well," Smiffen said doubtfully, "I hope the boy 'll appreciate—"

"Oh, pshaw now," Bigelow replied.

"Parents don't expec' no appreciation. We all know it 's easier fer one mother to look after seven sons than it is fer seven sons to look after one mother. He 's all right. He 's a good boy. Don't you worry."

XIV

COMING to their supper, in this spirit of jovial optimism, they made it a true feast and celebration—on the remains of the dinner's turkey, helped out with home-made bread and a plentiful dessert of cake and preserves. Even Letitia came out unexpectedly with a mild humor that set Bigelow wheezing with his head thrown back, his eyes shut, in a convulsion of noiseless laughter. He twitted her about Jim Bishop, and she replied gaily: "Well, I used to think myself that Jim Bishop did n't have exactly a romantic figure to look at—but as our own looks change our minds change with 'em."

"Never mind, 'Tish," he said. "Romantic figures don't get up early to build fires.

Jim 's all right. An' he 's waitin'—any time you want him." He winked at Smiffen.

"I don't believe in bein' too hasty," she said. "Wait till Robb 's settled in life." And she nodded and smiled at Hallie, who blushed up prettily, as embarrassed as a bride.

Smiffen was enjoying it. It was a little home scene from a sort of life that he had not known since his boyhood. It was as sweet to him as poetry. And there was one incident that almost brought tears to his eyes.

That occurred when supper was finished, and Bigelow, after regarding the remains of the banquet suspiciously, blurted out: " 'Tish, how do we manage to live like this, an' the grocer's bill last month only—what it was?"

Letitia, to conceal her mortification at his asking such a question before company, answered brazenly: "Cost of livin' 's gone down, Wes'."

"Has, eh? Had n't heard it," he said.

She reached the grocer's book off the desk behind her. "There it *is!*" She rose to take away the plates.

"What 's this?" he said, discovering a smaller book inside the other. "Why, this 's a book o' yer own."

She tried to snatch it from him; and failing in that, she had to explain in a low, shamed voice that it was "only fer little nibbles" she had had "between meals"—that she had not thought it right to make him pay for "extra bites" for herself.

He adjusted his glasses, and read drily: "'December twenty-six: one box starch.' Huh! 'Two packages bluein'. . . . One gallon kerosene. . . . One—one *mouse trap'!* Been nibblin' between meals, eh?"

"Oh, *Wes'!*" she cried, catching at the book.

He held her hand, patting it fondly. "I won't have it, 'Tish. You 're a guardi'n

"One—one mouse trap!"

angel. All you want 's trumpets an' wings to *be* one—but I won't have it. I 'll atten' to this."

He put the book in his pocket, and looked around for Smiffen, who had risen quickly and gone to make a pretense of studying the portrait of General Grant over the mantelpiece. Letitia went away to the kitchen with her tray. "Oh!" Bigelow said apologetically, recalling himself to his duties as host. "I got to go out an' bed the horses. Come along an' see Robb's workshop. Ever seen it, Hallie? Have to have it all swep' an' ready fer him when he comes back, eh? Come on. Want to show you what he 's done on that printin' press."

They had to wrap themselves up and go with him, smiling affectionately at him behind his back; and Letitia, slipping into the empty room as soon as they had gone, hastened to take from the desk drawer a shallow

basket of sewing which her experience with the grocer's book had made her guiltily anxious to conceal in a safer place.

It was with such sewing that she had secretly earned the money to pay for her "extra bites."

This particular piece happened to be a wedding wreath and veil which she had been making for Captain Bestor's daughter. She turned it over critically, took it out of its basket and scrutinized the sewing on the hem; and as she fingered it, a mild flush mounted her cheeks. She stood with it in her hands, smiling at it absent-mindedly.

"Looks a mite too long," she said to herself, with an air of offering herself an excuse for yielding to a temptation.

She glanced at the windows; she turned from them to a small square of looking-glass that hung on the wall near the mantel; and she looked down from it at the wreath of blossoms and the veil in her hands.

Then she put them on, twinkling at her reflection in the glass.

Her blushes faded with her smile. She let her hands fall slowly. She drooped a little, and stood looking at herself sadly, her face showing yellow below the white wreath.

The old room watched her—that room to which she had come, years before, when Bigelow, a helpless bachelor, had wanted some one to assist him in bringing up the baby he had adopted. She had accepted the care of the child as a duty of patriotism. He was her "war baby"; and she had not begrudged him the maternal love and the maternal solicitude she had lavished on him. She had been willing to postpone her own life, for the time—to let Jim Bishop and his affection wait until the boy should be big enough to do without her. And with her mind always upon these others, with her days full of work and her thoughts all pointing her forward, she had gone on in

a blissful unconsciousness of the fact that time was not standing still for *her* either, that no matter how short the years seemed to be to look back upon, each year was a year long and her life was passing.

The sight of her face in the glass, grotesque beneath its crown of bridal blossoms, had put the truth before her shockingly. She turned quickly to the room, wide-eyed; and for the first time she saw that it too was old, worn and shabby. She looked at the baby's high chair, the chair that only yesterday Robb had—Yesterday! She sat down, as if all the weaknesses of age had descended upon her in an instant. Old? She had grown old! How had it happened? Why had n't she noticed it? And with her hands in her lap, fumbling at the veil that had entangled itself in her fingers, she sat blinking like a person wakened from sleep who tries to recapture the conviction of a dream that has passed.

She did not see a shadow at the window. She did not hear the outer door opened gently. (Jim Bishop had met the others outside, and he had come in to enjoy, in their absence, a tête-à-tête with 'Tish.) But as he came into the room, she turned, startled; and he cried: "Lord, Letitia! How it does become you!"—radiant with the admiration of a superannuated gallantry that had risen at once to the call of the sentimental occasion.

She snatched the wreath off in spite of his protests, stammering that it was not her veil—that she was doing "a mite o' sewin' " which she would n't have Wes' know of, for all the world.

"Well, well," he said, putting all that aside, "it 's eighteen years since we first—" He sat down all smiles, his artificial leg sticking out unbendingly straight before him. "It 's eighteen years, 'Titia."

She did not brighten.

"Lord, Letitia! How it does become you!"

"It 's come over me, to-day, with *conviction,*" he said—and the note of conviction sounded rather forced—"that a weddin' in this fam'ly would cheer things up a little. Eh?"

She did not reply. She looked down at the veil in her hands.

"Come," he said. "It 's New Year's day, Letitia. Let 's plan a New Year's weddin'. . . . Seems to me it 's a sort of a duty on our part."

She shook her head. "There 's a time fer all things," she said hoarsely, "but fer some things the time 's gone by."

"Oh, pshaw," he protested.

"I knew it, just now when I put this veil on."

"Now, Letitia, don't you let—"

"There 's some things you can't put off, Jim," she said. "When I first knew you wanted me, it—it lifted me right up to the skies. But after a man proposes fer eighteen

years steady to one woman—" She smiled dubiously in a distracted appreciation of the humor of the situation. "It 's been a G. A. R. weddin'—an' a Fourth o' July weddin'—an' a New Year's weddin'—but it ain't never goin' to be a weddin'." She began to fold up the veil and put it back in its basket. "We 're old—an' we got old apart. It 's too late."

"Oh, pshaw!" he protested, undiscouraged. "*We* ain't old."

"Well," she said, her sense of humor coming to her rescue, "maybe we ain't—but, oh, Jim, we 've been young an awful long time!"

He laughed, with her, reluctantly. "Still—"

"No," she said, putting aside the sewing basket, "I 've sort o' got tangled up in Wes's life an' Robb's life, till I don't seem to have one just fer myself. I 'll tell you, Jim: you 're welcome to sit in at a meal, an' I 'll always run over an' darn your

clothes, same as ever, an' you can come and keep me comp'ny evenings, an' sit by the fire—"

He had the doubtful face of a middle-aged lover who finds the glamour of his occupation suddenly departed. "Sittin' by the fire 's cold work," he said.

"Well, Robb 'll be home soon." She had begun to bustle mechanically about her housework. "It would n't seem home to him without me. . . . No, there 's no way out of it, Jim Bishop. We 'll have to go on sweetheartin' the rest of our lives."

"It ain't on account o'—it ain't because I had to take Robb, is it, 'Titia? It was as hard fer me as—"

"Nonsense, Jim," she replied. "I know how that was. We ain't worryin' about Robb." And she told him the news of the patent.

He was not as cheerful about it as he might have been; and he rose, crestfallen,

when he heard Bigelow returning. He grumbled: "I don't know that I thought y' ever really *would* marry me, 'Titia, but still—"

Letitia had disappeared with her sewing basket. He looked after her, rather mournfully.

"Well, Jim," Bigelow greeted him, "is there any brighter prospec's fer the comin' season?"

He shook his head.

"Don't give up," Bigelow chuckled. "Women are like grasshoppers. You never know which way they 're goin' to jump."

Bishop stood looking into his hat a long time; and then, turning moodily, he went out without a word.

There was an air of absent-minded finality about his exit, and it had the effect of reminding Smiffen that it was time he was thinking of his own departure.

"Well, Mr. Bigelow," he said, "I don't

"Women are like grasshoppers"

know how to tell you how much I 've—I 've enjoyed the privilege of spending the day—of being here with you. I 'm not a—well, a family man, myself, and when I 'm not living in a hotel I 'm on the train. I never realized before how much I 've missed in life. I used to think I 'd missed a lot of trouble—and maybe I have. But, I don't know—even trouble—even troubles like yours—well, they 're life! And the way that you 've—well, it 's taught me a lesson. Human nature—" He held out his hand impulsively. "Human nature, like *yours* anyway—it makes a man think better of his kind."

Bigelow grinned with an almost boyish bashfulness, shaking hands. "Oh, *pshaw!* You—I—what 've you got to go fer? Can't you stop the night with us? We 'll—"

"Got to get back to business! I 'd like to stay here till the boy comes back—and

see you all happy together. But I 'll see him, maybe. I 'll stop off some time when I 'm going through again. I 'll just run along down to the depot before it gets dark and see whether that eight o'clock 's going to be anywhere near on time. I won't say goodbye now. I 'll be back."

And with a hasty wave of the hat that promised a speedy return, he too left them.

XV

WHEN Bigelow turned from the door he still wore a sort of "company smile" that was half pleased and half embarrassed. It faded as Hallie left him—to help "Aunt Letitia" in the kitchen—and his face gradually fell into a look of fatigue. It had been a trying day for him. All this talk of Robb had worked upon his nerves as well as upon his feelings. It had exhausted him. He found himself tired—flat—discouraged. The future looked less promising than it had appeared in the first glow of the news of the boy's success with his "spring bolt." He stood at the window and watched the still light of sundown deepening into early dusk.

The old days had gone—the bright days of Robb's childhood, with their simple happiness and their assured hope. Now the boy must come back to a marred life, and have always in his memory the bitterness of suffering, and work to win back the confidence that he should never have lost. It would take years, and Bigelow felt himself an old man who might not live to see the end of it. Perhaps Robb would not wish to stay in the little town where his disgrace was known to everybody. He would be going away. He might even not come back from prison, but prefer to take his work and his inventions to the city. He was no longer a child; he could not be ordered out to lie in the hammock whenever he talked of leaving home. No, no. The old days were gone. The old days were gone.

Bigelow turned his back on them with a sigh, and went to take a lamp from the mantel shelf, shuffling almost feebly across

The old days were gone

the room. He struck a match and coughed and wheezed weakly, choked with the sulphur fumes, as he lighted the lamp. Old age was coming—a lonely old age. "Well," he said to himself, "that 's the way it is. That 's the way." And he went resignedly to his room, to put on a pair of slippers so that he might settle down to patient comfort for the evening.

The clock ticked placidly in the silence. The smoke from the match hung and drifted about the lamp. The warm room waited, as tranquil as domesticity, as calm as old love. And when the door opened and the boy stood there, the very hush and dimness of it welcomed him into peace.

The mild light showed him pale, tired-looking, and very sad. He wore his summer suit of snuff-colored cloth, without an overcoat, his collar turned up against the cold, his hands red to the wrists. He shivered; his hat shook in his numb fingers; but his

face showed no consciousness of his condition. He stood looking from one remembered detail of the room to another, breathing quickly, all the desire of months of longing feasting in his eyes.

He had lain awake in his cell at nights, picturing that room to himself, in a boy's attempt to cheat the empty darkness with the image of home. He had gone in imagination—as his eyes went now—from the old desk in which he kept his love letters unsent—to the little melodeon long since dumb—past the mantelpiece with its remembered ornaments—with its war prints and its flag and the bugle that he had so longed to play with as a child—and all these cheap and simple furnishings were as dear to see again as if they had been the beauties of some Eden from which he had been driven. Home! It was home!

His knees weakened with the rush of blood to his heart. The whole place swam before

him. He dropped his hat and staggered to the table; and sinking into a chair there, he laid his head on his arms and felt his tears hot on his hands.

It was so that Bigelow first saw him. But the old stage driver, coming noiselessly in from his bedroom in his slippers, could not be sure who it was—or would not believe the evidence of his own eyes that it was Robert. He stood with one hand on the latch of the door, staring palely at the head and shoulders that showed in the lamplight. And when the boy sat up slowly, blinded with tears, looking directly at his father without seeing him, Bigelow's "Robert?" was given in that peremptory quick voice of fear in which a man challenges a hallucination.

The boy tried to blink away the blur in his eyes, rising to face the voice.

"*Robert!*"

It was the cry that is wrung from the

"Robert!"

The boy sat up slowly

heart when a strong joy gives it a wrench of pain and the throat clutches on the voice and the jaws stiffen. The old man, with his arms outstretched, tottered forward; and the boy sprang to catch him as if afraid that he would fall.

Their words were inarticulate, broken with a sobbing laughter. Bigelow, his arms about the boy's shoulders, beat him on the back, and held him off, and took his face in his trembling hard hands, and fondled him, and grimaced speechlessly with features contorted in a tooth-chattering grin that was drenched with tears of delight. "M-m-my boy! Robert! T-tell me—" He reached with one hand to turn up the light, holding the boy with the other as if afraid he might escape again. "How—How—"

The boy stammered: "I 've—I 've been pardoned, Dad!"

Bigelow let him go, then; and laughed

"Are you hungry? Are you?"

and wept together, wiping his eyes with his bare hand and the sleeves of his shirt. "Pardoned! My—my poor boy! You 've been pardoned." He called: "Letitia! Letitia!" He caught at Robert. "Are you hungry? Are you?"

"*Yes*, Dad!" the boy cried.

"Letitia! Letitia!"

And when Letitia came hurrying in, the old man greeted her with a crazy: "He 's hungry!"

"Robert!" she screamed, and rushed to him.

She was still hugging him, hysterically, when Hallie followed in, alarmed. She stiffened with an incredulous low gasp of "Robb!"

Bigelow nodded and chuckled and caught at Letitia and turned her around. The boy started back at sight of Hallie and dropped his head guiltily. The girl went to him.

The girl went to him

She put her hand under his chin, and raising his face, she—

"Hailie!"

She kissed him. And as the boy's arms went round her, Bigelow and Letitia tiptoed silently out of the room.

XVI

"OH, Robb!" she wept. "Robb!"

He caressed her and tried to comfort her. "It 's all right, Hallie. It 's all over now. It 's—it 's all right. I 've been pardoned. It 's all over now. You ought n't to cry *now*."

"I 'm not," she sobbed. "Not because I 'm—oh, *dear!*"

He understood, at last, that it was her relief that had overcome her—her happiness. "Hallie," he said, "I think it 's the pluckiest thing a girl ever did—your standing by me this way. I—" He caught her to him. "I 'll be good to you, Hallie," he whispered fervently. "Oh, I 'll be *good* to you!"

"You—you won't go away again?"

"Go *away!*" he cried.

"I was afraid you would n't come back."

He held her away from him with a sudden thought. "Hallie," he said, "your father—He came down on the train with me. He 's looking for you. Does he know where you are?"

"Father? Here?" She glanced back at the door, startled for the moment. Then she shook her head. "I 've left him. I 'll never go back. Never! I 'm not afraid of him. I have money of my own. I 'm going to live with my cousins till—till you 're ready to—"

"Hallie!"

His boyish ardor overwhelmed her in an outburst of passionate young kisses. She clung to him, breathless, a little frightened. "Robb," she gasped, in a delighted tremor. "You 'll—oh, *Robb!*"

"I could—oh, I could *eat* you," he laughed.

"You *must n't . . . now!*" She freed herself, to face Letitia's return with her tray; and laughing, with her young cheeks aflame and her eyes still bright with tears, she danced over to the table and helped spread the cloth, shaking her head mischievously at Letitia, who tried to tease them both with an admonishing and roguish smile.

Bigelow came in, bringing a lighted lamp in each hand, in a festal desire to have light on their happiness. Robert drew the blinds. Hallie and Letitia set the table. And they all talked and laughed together as if they were about to make a picnic meal on a holiday.

The boy had to tell them about his inventions, his plans and his hopes for the future —which he did, between ravenous gulps and swallows, smiling from one face to another as they all watched him with their elbows on the table, delighting in his appetite and

his good spirits. And *they* had to tell him all the small happenings of the interval during which he had been gone. And if there was, over them all, the dark memory of the prison and his disgrace, it only served to make them more determinedly happy in the dear joy of being together again, here in the simple sanctuary of their home, with the world and the night well shut out and resolutely unremembered.

Even when Robert told them that Judge Andrews was in town, looking for his daughter, it gave them only a momentary pause of doubt. "He spoke to me," Robb said. "I think, from the way he acted, that he helped—Well, he knew I was pardoned. I thought he 'd helped to get it, perhaps. He asked me if I knew where Hallie was."

"Did he say he was sorry?" Letitia asked. "Fer what he 'd done?"

"No-o," Robb admitted. "But—well, *you* know—he could n't very well *say* it."

"Then you should n't 've spoken to him till he *did*," Letitia cried.

"Oh, *well*," the boy apologized for himself. "I don't think—"

Bigelow nodded his approval. "That 's right, Robb. We all made mistakes—all of us. It 's over. It 's all over. We got to ferget it now. We can't do *him* no harm by hatin' him; an' we can't do *ourselves* no good. Hate never hurt no one but the hater. We got to put all that behind us—an' go ahead. The workshop 's waitin' fer you. We opened her up t'-day."

"*Did* you, Dad? Good. I 'm—"

They were interrupted by a peremptory ring on the door-bell. Hallie started to her feet, expecting her father. Letitia's face hardened, with the same thought. Bigelow rose slowly, but without hesitation. "Finish yer supper, Robb," he said.

It was Smiffen—hurrying back to get his valise, so that he might catch an unex-

pected train that had been delayed by the "tie-up." And his surprise and pleasure, when he saw the boy, put them all in high spirits again—all except Robb, who did not appreciate the stranger's interest in him nor quite respond to it at first. Smiffen shook hands with them all and congratulated them all. "Well! Well!" he cried. "I think I 've brought you luck! I feel as good as if I 'd made a hundred-thousand-dollar sale! This is fine! *Fine!*" He beamed on the boy, paternally. "Young man," he said, "I want to tell you that you 're to be envied. I envy you myself. To be able to come back to a father like yours and a girl that does n't go back on you when—no matter *what* happens! What 's trouble when you have people like that behind you? You 're in luck. You 're in luck."

"Well," Bigelow replied, "there 's no denyin' Robb has personal—"

"Oh, *Dad!*" the boy stopped him, reddening nervously.

Bigelow patted him on the back. "All right, Robb. All right." He winked apologetically at Smiffen. "He 's modest. Can't stand to hear himself praised."

Smiffen signalled that he understood. He did not laugh, even inwardly, at this doting fondness. "Well, there 's a good time coming," he assured them. "I 'll drop off the train some time to see you all enjoying it. I 've got to go now, but I 'll be back some day. Goodbye."

He shook hands with them all round again—thanked by Hallie with a shy smile and by Letitia with a little fluttered pressure of the fingers. Bigelow took him to the outer door, and they stood a moment on the porch, while the old stage driver renewed his hospitable invitation to come and spend a day with them any time that he could.

—tiptoed silently out of the room

"I will," Smiffen kept saying. "I will—with *pleasure*," retreating down the steps sideways, reluctant to go. He was on the last step when he saw a man with a walking-stick shouldering up the path from the gate.

"Hello!" Bigelow said under his voice.

Smiffen stepped aside into the shadow, lingering awkwardly, intending to say his final farewell as soon as Bigelow had done with this newcomer.

Judge Andrews stalked into the light of the open door. He said, in the tone of a challenge: "Mr. Bigelow, is my daughter—"

Bigelow put out his hand. "She is, Judge. She is. Come in." And when the Judge made no motion either to accept the invitation or the proffered hand, Bigelow went on: "There 's nobody in this house 's got anything ag'in' you, Judge. We 've all made mistakes. Ferget—fergive an' ferget. Come in. Come in."

The Judge mounted to the porch, half ashamed and still half resentful. "We 've been expectin' you," Bigelow said. "You 've *got* to be frien's now, fer the sake o' the young ones. Shake!"

The Judge took off his hat to enter, and held out his hand; and for a moment the light showed his tight lips trembling in the grim weakness of faltering pride. Then he turned and went in—and Bigelow followed—and the door closed.

The door closed; and Smiffen stood, like one who has finished a story and shut up the book, staring blindly at the pictures in his memory and disappointed because he had come so soon to the end. The thin, far whistle of a locomotive recalled him to himself. He started hastily and stumbled through the snow to the gate; but there he paused and looked back at the lighted window; and when he went on again, more slowly, it was with the tender-eyed smile of

a man who had met simple virtue in distress, and watched it bear with sorrow unembittered, and seen it come to happiness at last.

THE END

Date Due
